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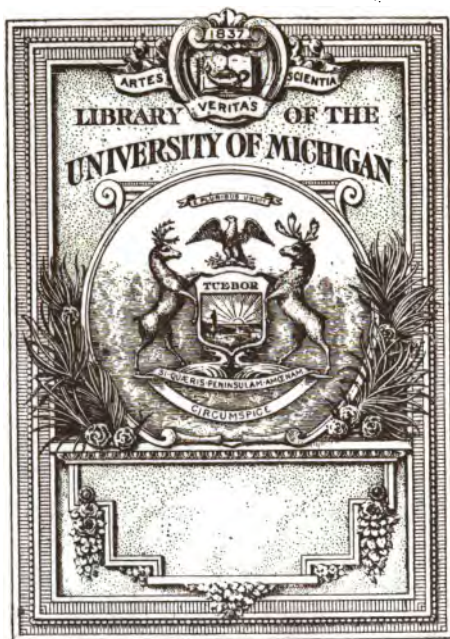
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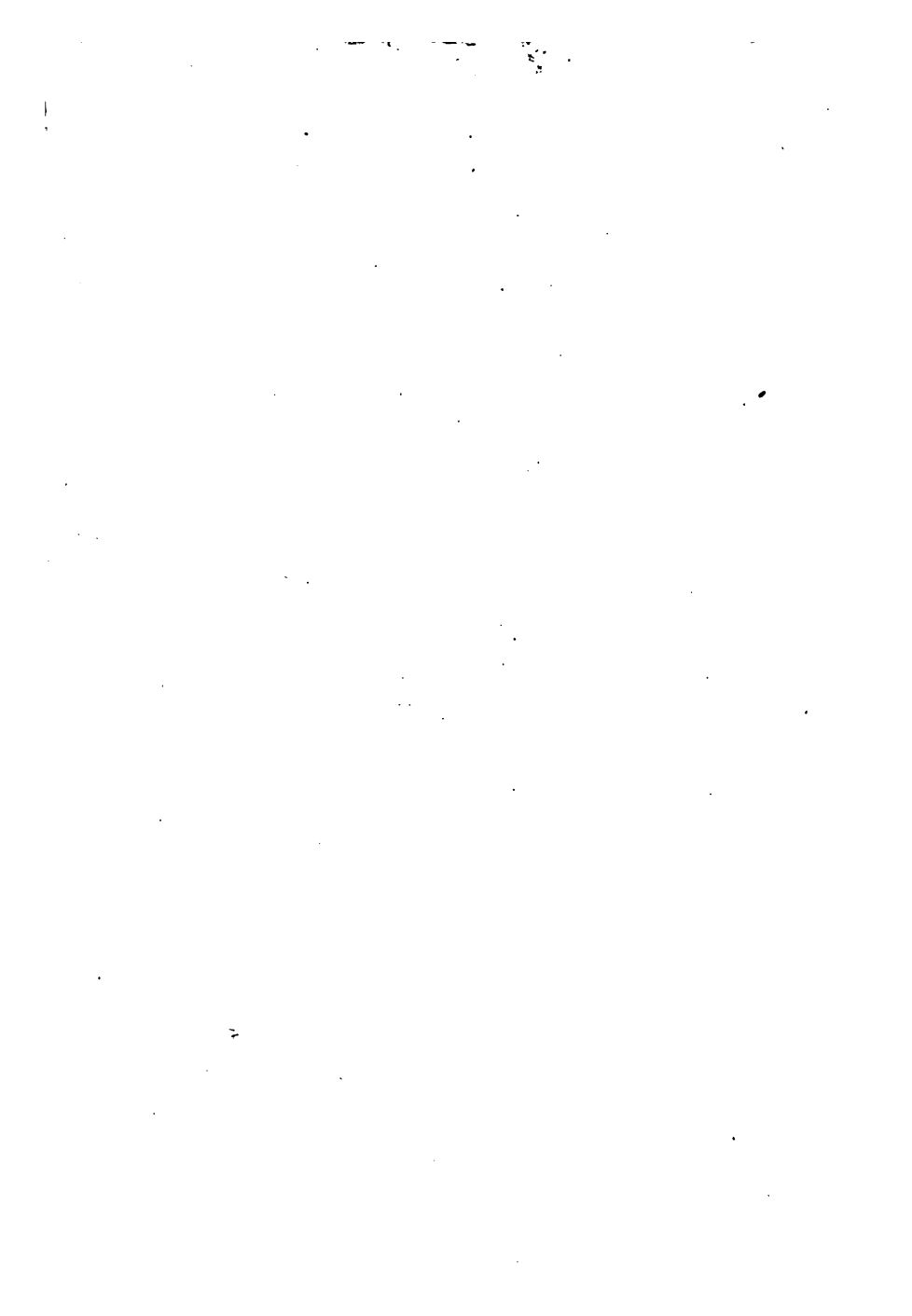
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# AFTER MANY DAYS

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# AFTER MANY DAYS

*An American Novel*

BY



TWO AMERICANS

THEODORA B. WILSON

AND

JAMES CLARENCE HARVEY

NEW YORK

LOVELL, CORYELL & COMPANY

43, 45 AND 47 EAST TENTH STREET

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# After Many Days

By

Theodora B. Wilson

And

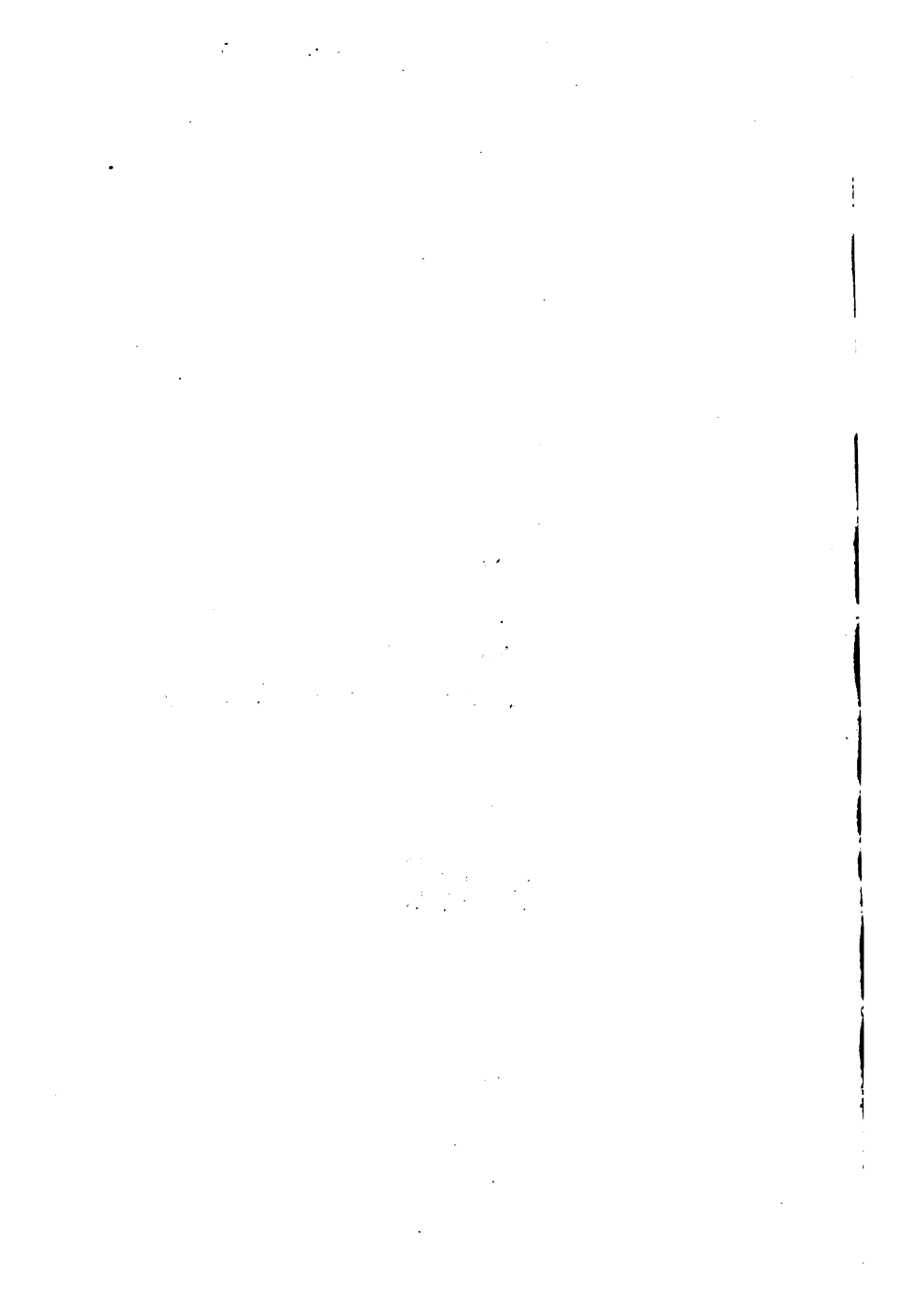
James Clarence Harvey



New York

LOVELL, CORVELL & COMPANY

43, 45 & 47 East Tenth Street





# AFTER MANY DAYS.

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## CHAPTER I.

A MILE from town, across wide pástures, lay the sea. Cliffs skirted the shore and bare promontories of primeval rock jutted sheer into the water, grimly impregnable in the face of wind and wave. Almost a gale was blowing and the waves dashed further and further up the strip of land that guarded the base of the cliff, trailing ropes of seaweed, brown and green, and scattering myriads of seaworn shells along the beach. Shadows of wind-clouds wheeling stealthily across the glittering surface of the deep, eclipsed the sun-gleams fitfully.

The motionless figure of a young woman formed a silhouette against the sky. The air was sharp and she drew her shawl more closely around her throat as she watched a cone of sunlight flitting shorewards.

To her, the view was as familiar as the face of a friend. The ceaseless murmuring of the waves seemed just then, strangely suggestive of life's unrest.

"Only," she thought, "we have sleep and death, but you go on forever."

Suddenly a harsh voice muttered her name. She turned with a perceptible start,

A miserable-looking boy, had stolen silently upon her. He was short and slight almost to emaciation ; his features pinched and drawn ; his skin peculiarly white ; his gray-green eyes, pitifully empty of expression.

"Come," he said, pointing to the strip of glistening sand beneath the cliff. "There's lots of pebbles down there, white ones, see !" And from his pocket he produced a handful of stones and shells.

"Did you come across the fields, too, Ezra ?"

"Yes, I followed ye all the way. Let's go down."

"The beach is too wet," she said, gently. "There is our big rock yonder, come and talk to me a little while," and, as usual, he fell in with her wishes at once and without protest.

The shore road at this point was falling into disuse since the new street, on their right, had been constructed. People scarcely ever visited the spot, save to get a glimpse of the sea from an eminence. A small inlet, known as South Bay, curved into the land further along the coast, and it was there that the wharves lay, and the catboats and pleasure crafts were anchored.

It was an odd couple that had sought the scene to-day. A beautiful woman and a half-witted lad.

She seated herself on the smooth boulder, and he, taking his place on the tender young grass at her feet, studied her face curiously for a time without speaking.

Seizing a corner of her shawl he rubbed the fringe of it against his cheek, as he remarked abruptly :

"Next to Kathie, I love you."

"Next to Kathie," she said smiling, "always next to Kathie. We can't stay here long, Ezra ; it's too cold. Have you something to tell me ? Ah ! you have. What is it ? Something about Kathie ?"

"No, nothin' 'bout Kathie," he returned pronouncing the name softly. "Mr. Robert's comin' home."

The shell with which she had been toying slipped from her fingers.

"His cousin's comin' with him," added the boy.

"This *is* news," she said, and her voice trembled.

"It's years and years since Mr. Robert went away, ain't it? Is he like the other?"

"Like his brother? No. He has been away—he has been away, eight years this summer."

"And he isn't old and gray like the Captin'?"

"No, Ezra, he isn't old."

She turned her head and gazed at the sea. Eight years is but a brief span of life, an infinitesimal fragment of time, but eight years can transform a credulous girl into a serious, disappointed, self-contained woman. Eight years can change the ecstasy of first love into the cold realization of man's forgetfulness.

And this was what she saw when she looked at the sea. It was surely in some other life that she had stood here by these same rocks that August afternoon and listened so trustingly to Robert Cameron's eager plans for their future. How serene that girl's faith in him had been! How hard she had struggled to keep it alive as the years of their separation wore on and he slipped further and further away from home ties!

What weary battles she had fought with pride! What flimsy excuses love had devised for him, and how miserably it had all ended at last in a letter that had cost her bitter tears, for love and hope were beaten down and pride held the pen and traced the words that made those promises exchanged by the sea impossible of fulfilment!

The most prosaic lives generally own to some ro-

mance to be jealously hidden from the world. This was Janet Morvick's romance. It was not one to exult over alone, nor even whisper to a friendly ear.

To love a man and have him forget you is humiliation. She had realized that fact long ago but it now came back again with fourfold force.

She must strengthen her fortifications and buckle on an armor of chilly reserve, for the expected day was at hand when she would have to look Robert Cameron in the face, and hear him speak, and yet distrust him.

"Ezra," she said softly, "it is chilly. Let us go."

The boy began to gather up the shells he had been squaring on the grass. Jingling them in his pocket, he inquired :

"Do you know Mr. Robert's cousin?"

"She has never been here, Ezra. How could I know her?"

"Yes," he muttered. "I forgot. Kathie says she isn't going to live at the Capting's. She is going to live at Miss Penelope's. I hope," he added half under his breath, "I hope he'll marry her."

"He?" she echoed. "Mr. Laurie is her cousin too."

"I know, I know," he returned, impatiently, "but Kathie says she's rich. I wish—I wish he would."

"And I wish I could make you get over this strange aversion of yours, Ezra, for Mr. Laurie. There—there," she continued as she saw him scowl darkly. "I know it is because you love Kathie so dearly, but your sister is older than you; surely she can take her own part."

"He makes her unhappy. She believes him. I don't and some day—" he paused, and clinched his fist while a spasm of hatred contorted his features.

“ Oh, no, you won’t. Come, Kathie would be angry if she knew that you talked about him like this.”

“ Kathie is never angry with me,” he murmured, as the old vacant look once more settled upon his face.

They crossed the common together, and then at the corner of a short street called Bolton Place, she hurried on alone.

To those unfamiliar with its historic interest and non-appreciative of the panorama of its surrounding hills and dales, washed at their limits by a reach of the ocean, the town was unattractive.

Arriving from the busy city of Norwood by way of an unpunctual and badly leveled branch railroad, the stranger entered a village full of old colonial dwellings, with primitive stores, a weather-worn stone church and slumberous streets that straggled over the adjoining country till they became the highways separating prosperous farmers, but it was a peaceful spot, where the spirit of the past lingered among its numerous mementoes, spreading an atmosphere of placid dignity that age so often breathes.

Bolton Place was lined with small cottages. To the front door of one of these was affixed a painted board bearing the gilt-lettered inscription :—

{ DRESS-MAKING. }

Even to an indifferent observer this house was distinguishable from its fellows. Two blinds thrown back displayed the snowiest of curtains. Pretty window boxes of scarlet geraniums and running vines flourished in the sun and gave evidence of tender care.

In the front room two girls sat sewing.

Hearing the gate close they craned their necks.

"Yes, she is coming. What a comical idea to go walking over there to the sea this horrid, windy day. It's sure that's where she's been."

"Perhaps—" began the other, but she was unable to indicate the nature of her surmise, for the door opened and the subject of their conversation entered in her quiet way and took her customary seat.

Some six years before, the residents of Bolton Place had been mildly astonished at the appearance of the sign on the Morvicks' door.

"It's Janet of course," said Mrs. Stevens, the post-master's wife; "but to my positive knowledge, she's never learned the trade. Who's going to employ anyone so inexperienced? She'll make a dead failure of it, I know."

Nine tenths of Mrs. Stevens' friends were of the same opinion. Curiosity, however, frequently confers unexpected benefit on the individual who inspires it, and curiosity it was that laid the corner-stone of the success of the new venture.

Careful work, a nicety of finish, and a knack of hitting off diversities of taste, all did their part, and at the end of a year the young dress-maker found it necessary to engage two assistants. The cottage parlor accommodated a couple of sewing machines. Fashion plates littered the small table between the windows, and rockers and a long mirror were provided for the convenience of patrons.

But this room was all that Causauqua in general ever saw of Janet Morvick's home.

Aside from her aptitude for her one particular line of work, people knew little or nothing of the inner character of this strangely reserved woman, who had

grown from childhood to womanhood in their midst.

If we unconsciously adorn our actions with a veil of mystery they are apt to assume an illicit aspect in the eyes of our neighbors. People censured Janet Morvick for living so serenely within herself. Gossip never interested her. Her sympathy was quickly aroused, but it was very likely to be spent on the side of some unpopular candidate for public pity.

She rarely expressed an opinion, but it was a strong one and not easily disposed of, when it was given.

It made her smile when they called her proud and cold. It pleased her to have the world blind to what she termed her weakness.

To-night, when the work for the day was finished and the door had closed on the girls, she sat for a while in the silent room, thinking, until the tap of a walking-stick on the floor of the apartment across the hall roused her from her reverie, and she rose with a sigh and mechanically fastened the windows.

"They're gone. What's keeping you, Janet?" cried a peevish voice, as she entered the sitting-room. "If you've no thought of my supper, you might have of your own."

"It isn't late, father. The girls went early."

"Early?—it's always early with you. You seem to have a superfluity of time. It's a bad failing of yours, Janet, as your poor mother used to say."

"I will call you in a few minutes," she responded, gently.

Twelve years of constant companionship had taught his daughter to avoid arguments with John Morvick.

The natural effect of a vital will on a weak one was clearly marked in their relationship. He felt an instinctive respect for his reticent, self-reliant, elder

daughter, leaving without opposition, the entire management of their affairs in her hands, satisfied with the privilege of voicing his ill-humors at the drawbacks to his own personal comfort and gratification that their narrow means entailed.

Seated in his old arm-chair, he waited for the summons to the evening meal. The room was growing dark, but the absence of light made no difference to the sightless eyes now bent on the window, as though watching the shadows creeping along the deserted street.

For thirteen years, he had been hopelessly blind. He was but a little over sixty, but his affliction and a life of disappointments had aged him heavily. It was difficult to see a trace of handsome John Morvick in this feeble, querulous, white-haired old man.

His was not a cheerful temperament. When he was not dwelling on the past, he was talking of groping his way to the grave. He wished the Almighty would let him see to die. There was nothing left in life worth looking upon. He had made many desperate throws for happiness in his youth, but Fate had thwarted him from the beginning, and what can a man achieve when Fate is against him? He always spoke of Fate as though he were intimately acquainted with it, in this personified form; occasionally he called it Luck, but Fate or Luck, it afforded him great satisfaction to dilate on the persistence with which it had adversely dragged after him throughout his career.

The money which he had inherited upon the death of his father, Farmer Morvick, had dwindled away in speculations that Fate had managed for him. His property and his wife had succumbed to the same dire fatality, and lastly it had put its cold fingers on



his eye-sight, and left him blind and poverty-stricken with two motherless girls.

His reminiscent musings rarely went beyond this miserable climax. It never occurred to him to tell what had been done for him since that dread time, though he would have repudiated the idea that the omission indicated ingratitude.

He was deeply sensible, he said, of his sister Lydia Durward's generosity, but Lydia could afford to let him have the cottage rent free, considering how well fixed she was, with the farm increasing in value every year.

He knew that she had never approved of his early course, but Lydia was a thrifty, saving, narrow-minded woman. He had not attempted to explain his affairs to her, and he had not asked her for a dollar, till his own resources were entirely exhausted. He did not suppose she had cared to see the only near relative she had in the world suffer for the necessities of life. If Lydia had not come to his rescue, the town would, and at one period it had actually been a question which would act first.

Janet Morvick never forgot the feeling of terrified alarm that had rushed over her on the day that her father had brought home to her young understanding the full extent of their poverty. The county poorhouse had figured graphically in his explanation, and her tears for her dead mother had been dried in the glow of a hearty resolution which had shown itself first in the quiet determination with which she set about her work, as her father's housekeeper.

Mrs. Durward had reviewed what she had been able to do at fifteen, and Janet's exertions measured thereby fell a little short.

John Morvick had an idea that Janet and her aunt had never agreed. He knew that Lydia had stormily objected to what she termed Janet's turning the house upside down with dress-making, and for a season he had protested also, but their combined opposition had not prevented the undertaking. He knew that Janet paid rent for the cottage now, and it gave him a pleasurable glow of independence, and often emboldened him to ask Lydia for a few dollars when his allowance from Janet ran low. He wanted a great many things that Janet did not deem necessary to his well-being. Janet's ideas did not always accord with his, any more than they did with Lydia's, but he had done all that he could to help his sister re-shape them. He supposed his elder daughter was headstrong; in fact, to him, her will seemed an extraordinarily firm one since she was able to stand against Lydia.

Mrs. Durward was a formidable person to oppose. He never remembered having tried to oppose her but once, and that was when she had announced an intention of sending his little Edna to a boarding school. He had declared that Janet could teach the child—there was nine years difference in their ages—or the village school was good enough; it had given him his education, and it had provided Janet with some wholesome knowledge, but the village school had been pronounced wholly unsuitable for Miss Edna Morvick, and Lydia had taken his thirteen-year-old baby away from him and settled her in a fashionable seminary for a five-years course of study.

Janet had reminded him this morning that Edna was now nearly eighteen. Almost a woman. It was difficult to believe, but eighteen or eighty, she would always be a child to him. They told him her eyes were blue

and her curls golden and her saucy little face aglow with color, and his dead wife arose in his mind. They did not have to describe her voice, or her little dimpled hands, or her clinging arms. Her voice was sweeter to him than music, and the pressure of her arms around his neck dearer to him than sight.

He was thinking of his darling at the present moment, as he sat by the window, remembering that one more day could be crossed from the number that yet stretched between him and her home-coming, not for a brief vacation this time, but to remain.

Janet, in the cheery kitchen beyond, sang as she moved about the room, and her theme too, was love :—

“It is not—it cannot be set aside,  
It is not a thing to forget or hide,  
It clings to the heart. Ah! woe is me,  
As the ivy clings to the old oak tree.”

“Why did this song come back to her to-night?” she questioned, then recalling who it was that had sung it to her in the past, her color deepened.

People felt that she was a beautiful woman, but they found her beauty difficult to describe. No two held the same opinion about it. To one her large dark eyes were her chief charm, to another her mouth in repose, but, in reality, it was the soul behind the face that they saw.

A few complained that her expression lacked softness and among these were numbered those who called her proud and unapproachable, but critics of this class had never seen her smile, never seen her eyes fill with tears of pity and love.

In figure she was tall and extremely graceful. She

did not find many imitators in matters of dress, but whatever she wore was becoming and especially individualized, in spite of its severe simplicity.

After supper, when the lamp on the centre table was lighted, she went to the piano and played from memory, a dreamy melody that her father liked. Twice she repeated it, then the sound of steps on the porch made them both start.

"It is Neal, Janet!" exclaimed the blind man, eagerly, "I thought I heard the gate click. The boy's come home."

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## CHAPTER II.

TALL and broad-shouldered, Neal Fleming appeared abnormally big and strong beside the bent figure of his host. It would have been hard to say wherein lay the charm of the young man's irregular cast of features, unless, perhaps, it centered in a pair of penetrating gray eyes that grew, in conversation, soft and luminous as a woman's. A full tawny beard and mustache concealed his mouth and chin and thus obscured the best part of his physiognomy. A man may control the expression of his eyes, but the shape of his mouth and chin will speak in his favor or against him though his lips are mute. In manner he was quiet, in speech extremely self-contained. He held positive opinions, but never obtruded them unchallenged.

"When did you get back, Neal? This afternoon? I said to Janet this morning I thought you would be back to-day. How pleasant it is to hear another voice once in a while! We have missed you very much."

"Thanks," returned the young man briefly, riveting his eyes on Janet.

"What did you see, Neal, and what did you do?" she inquired. "I should think one might learn the city by heart in a month?"

"Oh! I saw all I went to see, but I am glad to be home. I am a rustic to the core, and the huge Metropolis, with its wonders, its wealth, and its wretchedness, is to me one mighty discord."

Janet smiled.

"Novelty," she laughed. "It is a case of novelty. If you remained you would probably go as mad as the maddest in time."

"Fortunately for me, then, I did not. I went to countless concerts, but somehow the music seemed beyond me——"

"Play something, Janet, do!" interrupted the blind man. "Neal, I never enjoyed those grand concerts myself. Were it not for Janet's music, I should go to roost at sundown. Since the child's been away, I don't have much to amuse me. She's coming home soon, though, and then the house will seem less like a mausoleum. You know what a merry little midget she is, Neal. She'll wake us all up. Ah, as her Aunt Lydia often says, she's not the least like our side of the house! She takes after her mother's family, the Tylers. I would like to know what has become of them all. Margaret and Helen came on, just before Edna died, but I haven't seen either of them since. Lydia stormed so when they wanted to adopt our little one, they never came near us again. I often think I'd like the child to know some of her mother's aristocratic relations. Ah! well, they went their way, and we have gone ours. . . . They may be dead."

"Possibly," assented Neal. He had heard this supposition many times before, and generally vouchsafed the same reply. He had long since decided which of the two sisters inherited the nobility of soul and sweet womanly dignity that characterized the women of that proud old Boston family from which John Morvick had won his girl-wife. Janet had told him the story of their runaway match, and from his own recollection of Mrs. John Morvick, it was not difficult to believe that she had differed greatly from her people. He had seen her sisters on the occasion of their only visit to Causauqua, and, though but a boy at the time, was impressed with the resemblance between them and Janet.

At her father's request, Janet took her place at the piano. As he ceased speaking, she smiled at Neal, who instantly went over to her side.

"Have you heard anything to-day?" he asked, gently. "You look very happy to-night. What is it?"

A tinge of color crept into her cheeks. She understood him.

"What do you mean, Neal? Nothing has happened since you went away."

"Then you don't know?"

"Tell me."

"Oh! nothing. I'll tell you by and by."

The blind man was growing impatient.

"Play on, Janet, what are you stopping for?" he exclaimed.

She took the first piece Neal handed her and touched the keys. Neal went back to his chair. John Morvick, apparently intent upon his daughter's playing, was listening, too, for any sound that might inform him that his companions were holding a conversation under cover of the music. Though he could not read the

young man's face, his tone, when he addressed Janet, convinced her father that she could become Mrs. Neal Fleming if she so willed, and he was always on the alert for some token of her surrender.

"Where is the boy's spirit?" he would ask himself. "Hanging on year after year like this!"

But John Morvick little knew this man who had loved Janet so faithfully and so long. Her life had been a singularly isolated one, and but for his unswerving support, she would many times have stood alone. From her childhood she had always turned to Neal for advice and encouragement.

Though there was but a year's difference in their ages, she had ever felt him to be immeasurably wiser than herself. She had never kept a secret from him, not even her love for his cousin Robert Cameron. After the first bitterness of her disappointment had passed, she had gone to Neal with her story, explaining with simple eloquence how Robert had wanted their engagement to remain unknown for a little while until he should learn what his western uncle intended to do for him; dwelling a little brokenly on the mistake that Robert had made about his feelings and concluding with the assurance that she was very thankful to have been given the opportunity to sound the depth of his attachment. However sincere her gratitude may have been, it made her lips tremble to talk of it, and Neal had undergone the keenest torture in being obliged to listen.

His own hopes had been very small, but he had redoubled his devotion and she had not realized what an important factor in her life he had become.

They had read and studied together. It had given him delight to guide her in her craving after knowledge

and she had followed his lead with such eagerness that her neglected childhood with its scraps of instruction was more than atoned for.

A year or two of such tranquillity had deceived him into believing that she had forgotten his cousin and he had put his own question to her with an intensity and eagerness that astounded her. Her face more than her words had shown him his grievous mistake. She had been frightened at her own thoughtlessness in not understanding the nature of his regard for her before. She had told him how utterly futile his wishes were, but with a woman's supreme inconsistency she had begged him not to leave her.

He had placed a stern watch upon every speech and action and as time wore on, had grown morbidly anxious to continue the deception which should lead her to believe that his affection had tranquillized and was akin to her feeling for him.

He intended to see his way more clearly, before he ventured to undeceive her again.

His cousin's continued absence had been the foundation on which he re-built his expectations. The report of Robert's engagement had made him jubilantly sanguine, but now circumstances were closing in upon him again. He could look forward only with dread.

He found it difficult to talk to John Morvick tonight and at nine o'clock made a sign for Janet to follow him into the sewing-room.

A little surprised at his manner, she looked up questioningly as he closed the door and stood with his back against it.

"I want to tell you something," he began, nervously, "I don't believe you know. Janet, Rob has come home——"



She started.

"Has come?" she queried under her breath—"has come?"

"Yes. This afternoon. His coming was most unexpected. Aunt Penelope had a letter from him a few weeks ago, but we didn't know then, whether Milly was to live with her sister or come on to see us. It was an all around surprise to me—but—but—I think you ought to know a few things about Rob for your own sake. As long as he stayed out there, it wasn't necessary to tell you, but now——" he paused and she looked at him wonderingly.

"Don't prevaricate, Neal. What is it? I know that he was engaged to his cousin Belle and she married someone else."

"Yes, but that isn't it—it's about Rob himself," he faltered, "he—he—well, Uncle Si wrote one or two letters before his death that made us anxious about him. For two or three years the habit has been growing——"

"The habit? What habit?"

"He drinks to excess, and I for one believe he's doomed." As he said this he looked her squarely in the eyes. He saw her recoil. He saw the color surge into her face and then retreat leaving her white as marble, but his hesitation was gone. He forgot himself. He lost sight of the fact that she might consider the confidence an act of meanness. He only realized that she was in danger and it was utterly impossible for him to stand by and permit her to put her happiness in jeopardy, however objectionable the course he must take in attempting to protect her.▪

"Indeed?" she said finally, with the first touch of coldness that he had ever detected in her voice.

"Granting that your supposition be true, why do you come to me with it so solemnly?"

"Because," he rejoined quickly, "it is best for you to know it at once. If you can be made to believe it, you—you may be cautious—you may be firm and far-seeing. Personally, I'm fond of Rob, but—but I wouldn't want to see anyone I cared for become interested in him."

"Do you think I shall become interested in him?"

"You will be tempted."

"In what way?"

"To marry him."

She drew in her breath sharply and crossed the room. He followed. This time she sat down on the sofa and he dropped to a place by her side.

"Janet, I don't mean to be impertinent. I don't mean to presume on our friendship, but it's second nature to want to shield you. You are not a practical woman. Your life is full of beautiful ideals. It would be like you to take up with a hopeless mission. I can imagine your faith in your power of working out another's salvation, but in Heaven's name don't begin with a subject like Rob; better take a wicked man, firm and positive in his iniquities, than a human reed. Remember I spent a month with Rob the winter he was in New Orleans. Don't think I'm too hard. Don't misunderstand me. I'm only thinking of your happiness."

"Don't, don't," she pleaded, her eyes brimming with tears. "I understand—I understand. Don't let us talk about it any more. Tell me about the cousin Robert has brought home with him. She is to live with you, is she not?"

He had forced her to listen to him, but already he

was beginning to doubt the wisdom of what he had said.

"She has quite taken Aunt Penelope by storm," he went on, speaking of his cousin. "Imagine an ever-so-small brown-haired girl, with wide-open appealing eyes, dressed in black. I thought, as I caught the first glimpse of her that we were all mistaken in her age."

"Is she as old as Edna?"

"Older. Twenty-one: she told us at supper; but it is hard to believe. There is so much about her that suggests a child, in spite of her quaintly serious air. But—" he suggested with a change of manner—"you are not hurt at what I said; tell me you won't—when you go upstairs and think it over; you won't decide that I've been too officious?"

Her expression reassured him.

"I could not think that of you," she said, gently, "your motive was kind even though your fears are—are—entirely without foundation."

"I wish," he returned, gloomily, "I could think so. I am so very sure you will be put to the test. He cannot come home here and see you again and—and——"

"Neal, eight years can work a mighty change in a man's tastes and expectations. Robert was but a boy when he left us."

"Yes, and he is not much more than a boy to-day. Rob is one of those who would never become men, if they should live to the age of Methuselah. I don't believe there is a man living who has better intentions, but he veers with every wind that blows. Can't you see that such a man is most unlikely to make a woman happy? I think he would prove true, and she would be master till some stronger influence arose and then——"

"And then? Oh, how distrustful you are of your own sex! Why will you persist in dwelling on the dismal side of every question?"

"Because unrecognized danger is the deadliest."

"What of imaginary danger?" She smiled, but rather wearily.

He took and held her hand for a moment before saying good-night. "I would die, die this instant," he exclaimed, little above a whisper, "if my death would secure you the happiness you deserve."

"I know, I know," she said, hurriedly; "you have always been so good to me. We should never have been so happy together if our friendship was not made of mutual esteem. But don't be fanciful. This dreadful picture of my—future husband is unreal. Why should one be afraid of phantoms?"

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### CHAPTER III.

MISS PENELOPE RAILSON was considered the odd sheep of the family. In youth she had been conspicuously unencumbered with the proverbial family beauty. Homely girls, however, sometimes make comely women, and at sixty, Miss Penelope's trim figure, friendly eyes, and silky white hair overturned the one-time opinion regarding her lack of personal attractions. Energetic, warm-hearted, inconsistent, with a woman's sublime inaptitude for facts, she gloried in argument, but no one could convince her when she had screwed up her mind to maintain her own conviction.

People knew beforehand that their favorite foibles, their behind-the-scenes hobbies, would be ruthlessly

ridiculed if Miss Penelope's bright eyes once fathomed them. Still, her ever-ready sympathy and thorough womanliness, worked wonders in her favor. To people honestly in trouble, she was a ministering angel.

Girls often wondered why she had never married. Soberer heads whispered of a life consecrated to the memory of a love for one who had not even known of its existence: her sister's sweetheart and husband.

This bit of crystallized romance was photographed on people's minds, and stood now, to the majority of Miss Penelope's contemporaries, as the solution of that lady's profound affection for Paul Fleming's son.

There was an out-of-the-way haste—even excitement—manifest in her manner this morning, as standing before the mirror she fumbled with the topaz breast-pin that held her gown together at the neck. If she was impolitic in speech, she was wise in the matter of dress, and understood precisely what became her years and miniature figure. Colors she had long ago abandoned, gray being her only change from black and white. Fluffy little breakfast-caps poised butterfly-like on her fleecy gray hair and delicate laces around her throat, where time was leaving his tenacious finger-marks, contributed to a pleasing general appearance.

Her toilet finished, she stepped lightly to her niece's apartment.

"Milly, child, are you awake?"

Receiving no answer, she entered. Neatly folded wearing apparel and the girl's black dress, carefully turned and draped on the back of a chair, appealed instantly to Miss Penelope's sense of order. Milly herself was sleeping soundly. A small head nestled among the pillows, the reddish brown hair tumbled into a tangled twist of curls. The face was childish in

contour, the sensitive kissable lips were slightly parted. On one flushed cheek glistened a tear. Spying this, Miss Penelope's heart overflowed at once.

"Poor lamb," she murmured and bending over the sleeper, brushed the tear gently away with a kiss.

Miss Penelope had not seen her brother for many years. She had never met his wife or daughter, but she was prepared to welcome the new niece to a place in her affections not far from Neal's.

Roused by the impulsive caress, a pair of very sleepy brown eyes gazed wonderingly at the face above her, as though unable to realize where she was; then, as clearer consciousness awoke, the flush upon her cheeks deepened.

"Is it late, Aunt Penelope?"

"It is breakfast time. Neal and I will wait for you."

She looked smaller than ever as she sat up in the big bed and caressingly threw her arms about the elder woman's neck.

"Aunt Penelope, I love you. I was so afraid I shouldn't. I asked Rob so many, many times what you were like."

"But his description wasn't very reassuring?" responded Miss Penelope.

"Oh! yes, it was; but he said you were a—a—disciplinarian."

"Indeed? It's precious little discipline he has ever known. He was a very terrible child—more trouble in one week than Neal in his whole life. But hurry, child, and dress."

"Is cousin Neal up?"

"Oh! yes, he is an early riser," said Miss Penelope, retreating to the door. But Milly's little white-robed

figure, wobbling on the edge of the rocking-chair as she struggled with a refractory shoe-button, once more brought her across the room.

"Child! I verily believe I have got mixed as to your age. You must be twelve instead of twenty-one."

The girl laughed, then suddenly her face grew sober.

"Papa always said that," she replied.

Neal was not alone when Miss Penelope entered the room below. Carelessly leaning against the mantel-piece stood a handsome young man, an inch or so shorter than his companion. A complacent smile curved his rather sensual lips; his hands, delicate and white as a woman's, appeared to be monopolizing his attention.

An involuntary sniff of disapproval was Aunt Penelope's first exclamation.

"Mighty must be the magnet that has drawn you out of bed at this unearthly hour," she said briefly.

"Unearthly hour! My dear aunt! It is fully eight o'clock, and who has preached the wisdom of early rising more consistently than yourself? Honestly, though, I am eager to see our new cousin. Rob's description of her was a lame apology. I couldn't get over last night. I didn't see Rob till midnight and then he was too stupidly sleepy to be clear about anything. Do you like her? Is she fair to look upon?"

"If I am able to answer your second question in the affirmative, it will be a passport for her to your esteem, at any rate."

"You never give me credit for being aught but a fool where a woman is concerned. See if I don't surprise you this time. I shall conduct myself in a manner that will astonish even you."

"In other words?" queried Miss Penelope.

"In other words, I will not——"

"Break her heart," interposed Neal, tossing aside his paper.

"Thanks! old fellow—that's it. A man hates to come right out with a speech like that about himself. It sounds confoundedly conceited."

Miss Penelope looked up at him, as he stood rolling a cigarette and thought what mischief his handsome dark eyes had already wrought. She was suddenly transformed, as it were, into an infuriated old hen, with one poor little chick to protect; the danger assuming the form of this too fascinating nephew.

"Don't flatter yourself," she protested, "that your cousin has never been looked at by a gentleman before and will be overwhelmed with your attentions."

"Rob says she's a strangely unsophisticated maiden. No knowledge whatever of—well, no idea of giving her heart to any fellow over yonder."

Further discussion was cut short by the appearance of the young lady herself. Her pretty hair was gracefully coiled on the top of her head; her black dress, with its severe bands of crêpe, set off the softness of her speckless skin. Timidly she regarded the three people who watched her entrance, but a smile stole over her face as she walked up to Neal, one small hand extended.

"Aunt Penelope told me you put those lovely flowers in my room. I didn't know it last night. Flowers are such a graceful welcome."

"I would have rifled the town, if I had reached home in time and had known you were coming," he said, warmly.

"Let me present another cousin, Milly. Robert's brother," Miss Penelope hastened to say, half con-



scious that Laurie was amused at the girl's ingenuous manner. Shyly she raised her gentle eyes to his face, and then she blushed. She recollected certain words of Robert's on the train.

As Laurie spoke to her, she was filled with an embarrassment that even Neal's kind advances, as they took their seats at the breakfast-table, were powerless to counterbalance.

Furtively she glanced, from time to time, at the handsome face across the table.

The night before, at supper, she had considered Neal's kind gray eyes and genial smile, worthy of admiration, but now, in her maiden esteem, this other new cousin suggested the Prince Charming of the fairy tales of childhood. "How proud they must be of him," she thought, while she listened in silence to their conversation. She thought of Robert, and involuntarily compared him with his brother. It seemed to her this cousin would be fond of books and poetry. She was almost certain he liked poetry. Then she glanced at the other. Why was it she felt so much more at home with Neal? She knew that she would never be afraid of Neal. When the meal was over Aunt Penelope left the room. Neal disappeared, and she found herself alone with Laurie.

"Come," he said kindly, "let us go out and inspect the garden. Not that it looks very frisky yet, but the air will do you good. Do you know," he continued, going over to where she stood on the great white fur hearthrug, "that you have scarcely addressed one syllable to me; yet I rose with the birds, and walked a couple of miles before breakfast, just to see you."

Milly looked up toward him with a quick smile of pleasure.

"Did you really?"

"I did, 'really,' and such an act is deserving of appreciation. Don't you think so?"

"Yes," she said, seriously, "it was very nice of you, indeed."

"Wasn't it, though I say it myself? Look—let me wind this scarf of Aunt Penelope's about your head, and we'll steal out of the side door. There," he said when he had arranged the scarf to his liking, and framed her face in a clump of little bobbing fuzzy balls, "at this instant you embody my idea of Priscilla. You know, Cousin Milly, how Longfellow's Priscilla is described. I will plagiarize his phrase for you—'modest, simple and sweet.'"

"I was sure you liked poetry," Milly said, earnestly, ignoring the very personal drift of the conversation in a way that somewhat startled him.

The air was invigorating. An avenue of old elms; an unbroken sweep of lawn, beautifully green and velvety in summer, with well defined and newly-gravelled walks, made up the modish surroundings of the comfortable red-brick house. To the east lay extensive apple-orchards, and past them purled a pretty running brook. In this direction he escorted his companion.

"You can hardly imagine," he remarked, "how differently this looks when the leaves are all out. There are so many lovely nooks round here. Aunt Penelope has foolishly sold a great deal of the original property. She thinks the place still quite large enough for herself and Neal."

"Your own home, Randlemeade, must be remarkably lovely, from what Robert has told me?" she said.

"So it is. You know the captain's first wife was a

Randle, and at her death he came into possession of the property. I suppose Rob has posted you on all these little ins-and-outs of family topography."

"Oh, yes."

"And has doubtlessly, in our family history, told you what an exquisitely amiable old griffin our surviving parent has grown to be, has he not? No? Well, Rob's been away so long, these impressions need to be revived."

They had reached the spring and Laurie was idly jerking little pebbles into its clear depths.

"Robert never talked much about home, but I gleaned enough to feel sure that—that, I should be terribly afraid of your father. I was not certain about Aunt Penelope. Cousin Neal I knew I should like."

"And what of Robert's brother? Were you certain you would *dis*-like him?"

"Well," she said in a low tone, "I was as positive about you, as I was, and am still, about your father."

He turned with an amused laugh.

"What did he say about me?"

She was silent.

"Upon my word, I'd like to know."

Milly raised her eyes and met his own. Her timidity seemed to have vanished. A scarlet spot stood in each cheek. Her hands she had demurely clasped.

"I do not think," she said slowly, "people should allow themselves to be influenced by first impressions, much less by prejudices formed before they meet. And yet," she continued with childish directness, "in spite of all this, I am prepared to say, I like you, and I haven't known you yet an hour."

"Do you? Then you attach no importance to my brother's innuendoes."

"He never said anything against you, only—only——"

"I know in a certain sort of fashion, peculiar to himself, he led you to picture me, first, as a sort of wolf of domesticity—in other words a 'male flirt'—didn't he?"

"Oh! but you're not," said Milly earnestly.

"In one sense, positively no. But flirting is a broad term, you know."

"But the habit is untruthful—evil!" she returned with decision.

He fancied himself conversing with a prim little puritan from Plymouth.

"Were you never in a situation where pretence was imperative?"

"No."

"Do you always say just what you mean and no more than you mean?"

"This sounds like the catechism, Cousin Laurie."

"Does it? Then I'll stop. . . . By the way, this is the spot where Neal's mother and her lover used to sit and look sonnets at each other. Dilapidated now, but pretty, don't you think so?" he asked, leading her to a weather-worn rustic seat, that girdled a burly apple-tree close by.

The young man's manner, his smile, the tones of his voice, combined to create that magnetic aura peculiar to some favored men and women. The charm of his personality, as a viewless web, he wove like some great human spider.

"Tell me all about yourself," he resumed, after a moment's silence. "Doubtless you talk by the hour to Rob. Do the same with me."

"Poor Rob, he'll never believe I'm anything but a child," she said smiling.

"You are small."

"Dreadfully." She went on with a comical shake of her head, "Jack can lift me with one hand."

"Jack?"

"My brother-in-law."

"Oh, I was afraid it was some other Jack."

"I don't know what you mean."

"Cousin Milly, did Rob tell you I was an awfully selfish fellow?"

"Please don't say any more about what Rob said, because he didn't say anything—that is anything unkind," said Milly, unwittingly committing herself.

"Well, give me an answer then to a serious question. Will you come over to my studio some morning soon? Aunt Penelope and the Captain are not on speaking terms, but Aunt Elinore will act as your duenna."

"I should like to."

"Which means you will. Do you know, I believe we are going to be first-rate friends."

"Yes?" she said, looking up at him frankly. "Oh, but I remember Robert said you were very exacting with your friends, particularly hard to please."

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "at last we have a genuine specimen of Robert's criticism. Which reminds me—that the very gentleman in question said if you'd nothing else to do, he'd run over this afternoon and take you for a glimpse of the sea."

"Oh, I hope he will!"

"I think you may safely expect him. Shall we go in? They must be wondering where we are. I want to see Neal a moment before I go home. By the way, Cousin Milly, what do you think of Neal?"

"I think he is good."

"What do you mean by 'good'?"

"Oh, don't you know? I mean kind, thoughtful."

"Sincere, you were about to say? I think you must have great admiration for sincerity. Do you know, like everything else, that virtue can be carried to excess. Your eyes protest you do not understand!" he ran on, amused at the expression of her face. "Eyes have a language of their own."

He bent his own upon her and she turned away.

"There," he said with a laugh, "though I was mute, you understood. Shall I translate? No? At least let me thank you for a delightful hour."

"You are very welcome."

"To another?"

She smiled and nodded.

Miss Penelope had outgrown the memory of her own feelings in girlhood. She was disposed to believe that, "under proper direction," her niece would come to see all things as she saw them. Accordingly, she lost not a minute in warning Milly against her cousin's insinuating ways. Laurie was her dead sister's son, and so she did not wish to be severe—but Milly must be made to understand him, and accept his pretty speeches at their true value.

The girl often pondered over her aunt's words, on which she put the following construction:—

"Dear Aunt Penelope! Does she imagine I don't realize the unlikelihood of Cousin Laurie's ever entertaining any 'serious admiration' for me! She fears I may 'misunderstand his kindness.' He is 'attentive and flattering to every girl,' she says. I daresay he is. but,"—she further reflected, slowly combing out her long hair before the looking-glass, "*she forgets that I am not a child.*"

## CHAPTER IV.

NEAL FLEMING thought the morning hours best for mental effort. He rarely felt any incentive to work "in the dead waste and middle of the night," that ill-favored favorite period with so many writers. He preferred to utilize the first fresh feeling that succeeds healthful sleep. Now, whatever others said or thought of the young man's ability as a novelist, one little woman, at least, was impressed with firmly-rooted faith in his high genius. If every publisher in America had returned his work she would still have maintained her confident belief in its redundant merit. She took a lively interest in the creations of his brain, promptly investing with life every character he drew. She would speak of them as glibly as though they had been old friends, even to the point of seriously questioning the author of their being as to the present condition of his imaginary creations.

"Is She married yet, Neal?" or "Have you killed Her yet?" she would ask—and the smiling novelist, flourishing a sheaf of unintelligible MSS., would nod mysteriously. Whereupon she would steal away and wait for an invitation to bring her work while a chapter or two was read aloud. She loved his room, in spite of its hopeless untidiness. It was so strongly suggestive of her big boy, with its scrap-books and clippings, fishing rods and foils, stubby pen-holders and great bronze inkstand, even his old out-at-elbows velvet jacket—all were associated with delightful hours.

Soon after Milly left him, Laurie sought his cousin

here, with the assurance of one to whom the question of being welcome or the reverse was not of the slightest moment.

Lazily ensconcing himself in Neal's own chair, he eyed the pile of written matter on the desk with the same air of courtly patronage he was wont to extend to Neal himself.

The tacit antagonism between them had been frequently emphasized in their boyhood, but as they grew older they avoided more and more any outward sign of disagreement. Laurie was repelled by an intuitive comprehension of the fact that he stood below zero in Neal's opinion.

At the completion of his college career, Laurie had spent two years abroad, giving his time with great persistency to art. Returning home, he fitted up a studio, and at intervals had executed several more or less pretentious studies. Like most amateurs, he was subject to fluctuations of enthusiasm. At times the fire burned so low that the sight of brush or paint was distasteful; then his fervor would revive, and he would neither eat nor sleep till he beheld his ideas take form on canvas.

Neal looked askance at him this morning, having a presentiment he had come to talk about Milly. He pointed to a cigar-case on the center-table and waited for his visitor to speak.

"Well," remarked Laurie, significantly, after a pronounced silence, "we are excellent friends."

Neal said nothing. He knew that their shy, demure little cousin in no wise resembled the girl that inspired special homage in Laurie, and he had made up his mind that this epicure in female beauty should not pick their newly-found relative to pieces. His silence



was rightly understood, but it had no effect upon his companion.

"You are not an inviting confidant, old fellow! But upon my word, you weren't my choice. . . . Look here, Neal:—do me a favor, will you? Aunt Penelope takes more stock in you than any other mortal. I don't want her to frighten our little coz with unpleasant stories about your humble servant."

Neal interrupted him.

"You give me credit for unusual penetration," he said slowly. "Let us see if I understand you. . . . Tidings of Cousin Milly's inheritance precede her—you conclude that it would be a prudent move to keep it in the family. You even decide to burden yourself with its present owner to attain your object. In Aunt Penelope, you foresee a stumbling block. Lastly, you desire me, vulgarly speaking, to 'sit upon' whatever opposition to your plans our worthy relative may deem it her mistaken duty to display. Are we of one mind—*so far?*"

"Entirely," returned Laurie, unmoved. "You have presented the bare facts of the case. Allow me to elaborate a little. Before Milly came on, as you say, the idea of keeping the money in the family had suggested itself to me, and I concluded I would make a cast for it. If I don't, some other fellow will. And I argue that I can give as much in return as any other poverty-stricken devil who, after all, would not be one whit more worthy of success. For all I know, it is the Captain's intention to give us his company for years to come. Then, how the deuce, my dear fellow, am I to pick up a living?"

"Unless," interrupted Neal, "Cousin Milly comes to the rescue?"

"'Unless'," repeated his companion, "'Cousin Milly comes to the rescue.'"

"If," continued Neal, provokingly, "there is one thing on earth, more than another, I'd like to be, it's a young woman with money."

"Would you *really*? You seem disposed to pity Milly, but, I assure you, your sentimentality is out of place. I flatter myself, as you know, I am a pretty good character-reader; and on a somewhat hasty sizing up, I am prepared to say that, on the whole, I am delightfully disappointed. She is by no means bad looking. She is well-bred, gentle, startlingly truthful, and promises to be a charming little girl to have in love with you, because the softening influence of the tender passion will smooth away whatever angles may be left. If I'm not deucedly mistaken, she'll turn out one of those domesticated angels so 'adorable to live with, whose will-power can be sapped with kisses and undermined by pretty speeches. A very plastic plaything in a lover's hands, yet full of little puritanic old-maid scruples, a veritable dragon of a girl, with everybody else. Last but not least, she is heart-whole."

"And if she wasn't?"

"Well, if she wasn't," said Laurie rubbing some fallen ashes beneath his foot, "I'd simply sail in and cut the fellow out. But I've always had a strange fancy for being my wife's first love. Oh, as for that," he went on, waving away an interruption, "she's likely enough to wake up, in time, you know, and find out I am of the earth, earthy; but her eyes won't open as quickly as though some other duffer had shed a previous light upon her understanding. . . . Look here, Neal, oblige me by hinting to Aunt Penelope that I'm in dead earnest this time, otherwise she'll fancy I'm

fooling the girl. I'd tell her myself, but she wouldn't listen. Of course I know it's rather a bitter pill for you to swallow, the deliberate discussion of one's intentions, without the preliminary attack of idiocy on my part commonly called 'falling in love.' But for downright calm, enduring happiness, she'll stand a far better chance than—well, than any of the dozen others, for whom, at sundry times, I've signified my utter willingness to die. In Milly's case, it's respect first—and love, a good second, instead of the usual fiasco—love first, and respect, nowhere. You see—I'm very candid."

"Very," returned Neal, contemptuously, "but I doubt Cousin Milly's appreciation. I don't think you'll get her to view the decidedly unique proposal with which you intend to honor her in the same light as you do."

"My dear fellow you don't for one instant imagine I shall burden her pretty little head with such an avalanche of analysis."

"Ah! you've no objection to romance on the lady's side, and will even simulate a little old-fashioned unnecessary affection yourself, in order to balance things: give her the shadow of love, if not the substance—isn't that it?"

Laurie leaned back in his chair, and carelessly blew out a thin wave of smoke.

"For the fourth time—*will* you speak to Aunt Penelope? I'd rather such little tit-bits of my personal history as still slumber in her memory should not reach Cousin Milly. Give me your word you'll smooth her ruffled feathers down and I'll take myself off."

Neal surveyed the lounging figure before him with secret scorn.

"I have no objection," he said at length, "against repeating to her what you have told me. But I fancy she will draw her own conclusions. As I understand you, you wish her to be impressed with one all-important fact—that you're in dead earnest this time. It seems to me she will very readily understand a man is likely to be in dead earnest when he is fishing for a golden fish."

"To the devil with your 'golden fish'," cried Laurie, impatiently. "But," he added, after a moment's reflection, "perhaps it would be wiser not to broach the subject to her for a week or ten days; till I have had time to 'fall in love' in the orthodox fashion. I begin to perceive that's where the Penelope shoe is likeliest to pinch. It is impossible to prove the ocean-depths of romance in an old maid's mind. Let us sum up, then. I start in and cultivate Cousin Milly—poor policy, I know, for in this case, she will not be vouchsafed that softly-scintillating twilight that succeeds the dawn of love, in which girls are deliciously tortured with uncertainty, asking, twenty times a day, 'does he mean anything?' A woman's never so enchanting as when she is in doubt about you. Aunt Penelope will do her worst and compel me ultimately to 'show her up' to her innocent niece, as a pragmatical and not too truthful old lady. I relied on you to spare your aunt's reputation. If I figured in one of your books, you'd soon find a way to smooth things over."

"Perhaps I should," said Neal, still with no great external show of interest, "but, as usual, I think you are flattering yourself that your affairs are of more moment to your relatives and friends than they really are. Beyond inspiring a hazy idea that you are given

to betting on horse races, playing cards, and making love, I don't think Aunt Penelope will greatly frighten Cousin Milly, even if, as you dread, she should chance to be in a communicative mood. But, even so, I sometimes fancy, a streak of miscellaneous 'cussedness' in a man's composition adds to his market-value in some women's eyes."

"By Jingo! That's an admission for you. You have but a faint conception of the interest a stratum of Lord-Byronism inspires in the female breast. In thoroughly good women it arouses a frantic longing to reform the stray sheep. If there's one thing the sex loves to do, more than sending a man post-haste to the devil, it is to drag him back."

"It strikes me," began Neal, impatiently, wondering why he suddenly felt such a hearty desire to pitch his elegant cousin out of window, "It strikes me, you are a trifle contradictory. If personal shortcomings are auxiliaries in a flirtation, why do you fear that a recital of your own will have a contrary effect with Cousin Milly?"

"Because," said Laurie, quietly proceeding to light a fresh cigar, "I prefer to pose as a hero after a virtuous pattern. I favor love with a strong mixture of admiration, not pity. But it's a matter of opinion. . . . By the way, old boy, I wish you'd take Kathie off my hands."

"Yes? If Kathie were a dog or a horse, instead of a young woman, I might be a buyer. As it is, I fancy you will have to come to an understanding with her yourself."

"So it seems," said Laurie with a sigh; "but I can't say I relish telling her I hope and mean to marry someone else. I believe she rather expects me to marry

her. I wonder why it is that young women, of her class especially, always jump to that conclusion, if you happen to hint that they have pretty eyes. Oh, well, I shan't let it disturb my digestion. . . . By the way, this is a first-rate cigar. Never saw such a fellow as Rob for fine Havanas—but he can afford it. It was a lucky lift for him when he took Uncle Si at his word, and went west. He's pretty well fixed now. It's a family failing of ours this ambition to live the life of a gentleman of leisure. But the old man made a not-at-all impartial will; Aunt Pen and you and I, not a solitary dollar. I wonder if he thought the favored heirs would some day make a match of it?"

"Hadn't much sense if he did," growled Neal.

"Oh! I don't know. Rob's a little racketty, perhaps, but I never knew a man that had more friends. There's not a deceitful bone in his body. But I hardly think he will be able to digest prosperity. Still, though he likes his glass, I hope he'll not make a fool of himself."

Ignoring this remark, Neal strode abruptly to the window, and stood with his back to his cousin.

"Did you ever hear any particulars," he asked, presently, "as to how Rob took Belle's marriage—why she broke off with him, and what sort of a man she married?"

"It's my opinion," replied Laurie, "Rob never really cared for her. It was a convenient arrangement, and doubtless pleased her father. I never knew who broke the engagement. Herself, most likely. A man, however much he wishes to be free from such an entanglement, seldom takes the step himself. Rob is still true to his first love, blind Morvick's daughter. She was positively the only person he took the trouble to ask

after last night. He used to think, before he went away, no one suspected his *penchant* in that quarter ; but, young as I was at the time, I foxed his little secret. They've had some kind of a tiff, no doubt, but mark my words, whatever brought about the coolness between them will soon be satisfactorily explained. Between you and me, I believe it is to this, and this alone, his presence here is due. It rather looks as though she had been waiting for him. There isn't a woman in town who can hold a candle to her. She must have had a dozen opportunities to marry. But yet she seems to hide her charms and beauty from the sight of men."

The curtain cord Neal had been viciously knotting flew from his fingers with a sudden jerk. His eyes looked darker than usual as he turned from the window, and resumed his customary seat.

His companion watched him furtively. To him it was inimitable sport to penetrate his cousin's superstoical exterior and sting the secret sensibility that quivered at the mention of a name. He had long ago discovered the shrine at which Neal's affections were offered, and was disposed to think this unreciprocated gift part and parcel of the man's constitutional Quixotism. To love without encouragement or hope was a bit of moral gymnastics that struck Laurie as an indication of insanity.

Neal at last saw the door close on his unwelcome visitor. With an impatient groan he took up his pen. From the window he caught a glimpse of a small black-robed figure dancing attendance on Miss Penelope, who was preparing to remove some plants from their winter quarters. How pretty Milly looked, with the bright morning sunlight on her childish face.

"Poor little soul!" he thought; "I'd like to carry her straight back to where she came from. *But probably she wouldn't thank me!*"

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## CHAPTER V.

BACK from the town, at the end of an apparently interminable lane, stood a weather-worn old farmhouse, that had been the Morvick home for generations. Architecturally it was without special form, but the cumbersome knocker on the divided front door, the low sloping roof, and the wide chimneys, appeared impervious to the ravages of time. Children, whose voices had once filled the rooms with musical hubbub, were gone, but the ancient roof-tree yet remained, with its weight of years, a relic of the past that time had overlooked.

The departed spirit of Farmer Morvick must have rejoiced to behold the management of his energetic daughter Lydia, to whom he had bequeathed his well-beloved possessions. Prosperity attended Lydia's every effort. In her he lived again. Determination that too often degenerated into obstinacy, executive ability that was akin to petty tyranny—these germs of character formed part of her inheritance. Beginning to sprout in childhood, they had often driven her gentle mother to despair. The combined wills of husband and daughter had succeeded in overshadowing the mother's entirely, and finally the poor little woman meekly relieved them of her presence, slipping out of the family circle into eternity with her usual humility. But discord survived and it was not until much later,



when the old farmer's last will and testament in solemn conclave had been read, giving Lydia the farm, and relieving her forever of her brother's presence, that anything like peace began to settle on the scene.

She was a comparatively young woman when thus placed in charge of the homestead. What induced her eventually to marry Anthony Durward, no one ever exactly understood. The wooing was mysteriously carried through, and even Anthony's particular friends remained in ignorance of his contemplated marriage until the ceremony had been performed. For some years he had been teacher of the district school.

Old-fashioned and eccentric in appearance, he had been a familiar "character" in Causauqua for years. Whatever his private ambitions may have been, thirty years' residence with a domineering wife had effectually killed them. He had not the ghost of a voice in the management of the farm, and scarcely knew the laborers by name, but he never showed the slightest symptoms of rebellion—agreeing openly with Lydia on all subjects save one, and that was Janet Morvick. When she became the topic of conversation, his pale blue eyes would fearlessly confront his wife's, and even in face of the assurances that he was "an idiotic old goose," he always found courage to nervously protest in Janet's behalf.

Up in one corner of the old house, under the sloping roof, he had arranged a dilapidated, much-read stock of books. A diamond-paned casement grudgingly supplied him with daylight, and under it he had arranged his desk, an attenuated antique that matched him well, where he kept his little worthless treasures of the cherished past. Seated before this, many placid

hours were spent, translating *morceaux* of his favorite German authors, or writing lengthy and obscure reviews of some scientific work that the world had digested years before.

No one but Janet ever saw those labored attempts at authorship. It gave him the keenest delight to have her visit him here, in this one corner of his little world that he could call his own. Removed from his wife's presence he could talk to his niece with glorious freedom. The spot was sacred to him because of its association with Janet.

The place was full of dream pictures. He always fancifully imagined that he could hear her voice in the silence. The old rafters had so often echoed her soft laughter. She had been close to his side so many times with her face upturned to his ; her great serious eyes asking questions that she could find no words to express, and he no wisdom wherewith to answer.

Up there the past and present had a trick of mingling so freely, that he often found it difficult to separate the two. The child, Janet, lived in his memory with such vividness, that Janet, the woman, frequently startled him with the suggestion of the years between, that he was marking so lightly.

He was thinking of her this afternoon, as he sat by the upper window, gazing dreamily out over Lydia's broad fields. He had never been able to lay hold of any tangible cause for unhappiness in Janet's life. She had never complained to him of her lot, and the simple fact that she was courageous enough to form her own opinions, and live by them, in the face of his wife's opposition and disapproval, was to him a powerful argument in support of his belief that Janet ought to be happy.

His affection for his niece was mixed with a very pronounced element of profound respect. He did not always understand her when she talked to him of her longing to broaden her life and enlarge the sphere of her usefulness.

A person who was able to live in Lydia's atmosphere and yet not be drawn into self-surrender at any point where their respective ideas met and clashed, was, to his way of thinking, beyond the need of any further power that the world had to bestow. He had never intimated these opinions to Janet in so many words, but she divined his unspoken thoughts, and, as a girl, her love of independence had been strengthened by the knowledge that he considered her very brave and strong to be able to think and act for herself. Poor old man! What the world called weakness, she called divine patience. What others deemed the senility of an over-ruled husband, she spoke of as the humility of a lovely trusting child-like nature. Thus they were drawn together by the bond of mutual respect. Anthony's love had always been a comfort to her. Anthony's little attic corner had been the scene of many a long talk, when eager, impassioned words bubbled naturally to her lips, fed and called forth by his sympathy, when her girlish hopes and aspirations were given new life, from the simple fact of being shared with another.

She knew that he had not always understood her, but he loved her, he believed in her; the rest did not matter. She did not always know, herself, just what she meant—just what she wanted—just what she hoped to attain. She stole upon him very quietly to-day. Wishing for her presence often brought it, he said, and he pulled forward his chair eagerly; the old broken-back chair

that she had occupied so often, and then he looked at her a little curiously.

"You've been talking to your Aunt Lydia, Janet," he said, reflectively.

She smiled and shook her head.

"No; Aunt Lydia did not hear me; she was in the milk-room; I came straight up to you. I have not been arguing—that is what you mean. My face burns because I walked over quickly. Father wanted to know if Aunt Lydia had received a letter from Edna; you know we expect her very soon."

"Yes," he said, "I know."

She looked past him, and her gaze wandered to the window. Her shawl slipped from her shoulders and she began to play absently with its fringe as it lay on her lap.

He studied her face for a moment in silence. There was a strange, wistful look in her eyes, that puzzled him. Suddenly she leaned forward and touched his wrinkled hand with her soft fingers.

"Uncle Anthony," she began abruptly, "have you heard that Robert Cameron has come home?"

"Has he come, truly? I'm glad. No, I had not heard; this is news."

"Yes, he was not expected so soon, I believe; but you know that they looked for him some this spring."

"Yes, I'd heard some talk of it——"

She bent closer, and her expression became tremulously eager, as she asked:

"What else have you heard about him, tell me. There has been talk about him, but it never reached me—I never heard—have they spoken to you?"

He turned away from her.

"Yes," he said, reluctantly. "The gossips have been busy for a season back, Janet, but I never gave much heed; I never believed it of him. Perhaps he has slipped a little; perhaps he did worry his uncle out there, but why must folks spread the story about? That won't help the boy. It's bound to discourage him. No, no, when they talk to me I say, 'Let's make the boy think we expect him to go right, when he comes back; let's take him by the hand and make him feel that we don't believe anything wrong of him, and that we care for him just as we used.' I've not forgotten him, and many will admit the same. He's undoubtedly the best of the family."

"Yes," she agreed, sinking back in her chair and trying to hide the tears that had sprung to her eyes. She felt like falling on her knees at his feet and thanking him for what he had said. She seized his words and accepted them greedily. His faith rekindled her own. The memory of Neal's dismal forebodings melted away—she believed because she wanted to believe, but so hungry was she for someone else to share her newly-formed opinion that she was willing to overlook the rather untrustworthy source of encouragement and give it a place of importance in this consideration of Robert Cameron's transgressions, past and to come.

She watched her companion furtively for a moment, as she essayed to advance still one step further towards possessing herself of his ideas on the subject that had been so unexpectedly thrust upon her to consider.

"Tell me," she began gravely, all unmindful of the utter impossibility of his being unable to answer her from the light of any personal experience in matters of this kind. "Suppose a woman promises to marry a man. They are both very young, and before he can marry her

they have to be separated. He loves her truly, bear in mind, in the beginning, but he,—he gets weaned away—new scenes, new duties, new friends prove too strong, and he forgets the old ; tell me, suppose circumstances send him back and they are thrown together again, is he a man to trust ? If he forgets her once, may he not do so again ? Would it be safe ? Oh, Uncle Anthony, would it be safe ? It would be very terrible for this woman to meet such a disappointment a second time, for she is a woman now, and not a girl. Life hasn't the same broad, limitless view ahead that it had when she was younger ; possibilities are narrowed down, dreams have faded, and actualities have stepped in. To love him again and see his love die would mean more than a few hours of weeping. It would be more than she could bear. Tell her—tell her what to do."

As she ceased speaking she pressed her face against his arm.

" You never told me, Janet. You never told me."

" No, I never told you."

" And I never guessed ; but it's all right," he continued, with sudden cheerfulness. " He's come back, he's come back to her. Trust him, aye, if he loves you, Janet. You can make folks take back all they've said. For your sake, the boy'll put it all behind him. The past will have no weight. I'm glad it has come to you. He'll take the hard work out of your life, but—don't give him any half faith, Janet ; let it be all in all—half faith would be worse than none at all—worse than none at all."

She looked at him through eyes that were full of happy tears. Every word that he had uttered found an answering echo in her own heart—he had voiced her own feelings—he had given expression to her own intentions,

Had he been possessed of Solomon's wisdom she could not have accepted his advice more trustingly.

His remarks were not in the least consistent. He would decline all belief in Robert's shortcomings one moment, the next he would dilate on the certainty of Janet's being able to save him, going so far as to trace the hand of Providence in the whole affair ; but whichever view of the case was being discussed, his listener gave him her hearty support.

Before she rose to go, she showed him a little scrawl of a note that she had received that morning. It was only a line or two asking for a meeting and begging that it might take place where they had said good-bye, eight years before ; but the simple request had cast such a glory about the day that Neal's gloomy argument had been utterly lost in the abnormal brightness.

Mrs. Durward's voice broke in upon their earnest talk under the old rafters and recalled them to the fact that the sun was slipping away from that side of the house. Anthony rose nervously and locked his desk.

Exhibitions of affection were very rare with Janet, but she felt transformed and drawn out of herself to-night. His own withered cheek was wet with the excess of his emotion, as she put her face to his, but she reckoned them tears of gladness and they both smiled, as they sought to straighten and compose their features—ere they ventured into Mrs. Durward's presence.

Janet did not linger when her aunt had given her Edna's letter. The all-important moment was rapidly approaching.

She walked down the lane from the homestead, almost in a dream. She realized that a crisis in her life was at hand, but she was prepared to meet it now,

without misgivings. Her trust would be as undivided as her love.

Nearing the street, she paused a moment and looked across the wide pasture that lay to her right. A stone wall separated it from the road. To her, the spot was strangely still. She saw a tall form hurrying in her direction, but she did not move. Nearer and nearer he came, till only the stone wall intervened—then—at the sound of the old name, uttered in that never-to-be-forgotten voice, she started forward and as he vaulted lightly over the wall, they stood, at last, side by side.

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## CHAPTER VI.

IT was a moment of embarrassment for both. The first greeting over, they had turned, and were walking toward the sea before Janet raised her eyes again to his face. He had changed but little, she thought. Time had touched him lightly. Had it not been for added breadth of shoulders and the brown moustache, she could almost believe that his absence had been one of a year—a month. How many times she had analyzed his face, feature by feature, in an attempt to grasp the clew to its mysterious fascination. Why did his eyes seem pleasanter than all other eyes, his smile sweeter, his little tricks of speech almost eloquent, when uttered in his genial, happy, hopeful tones? She could not tell. He was by no means a handsome man, but who would not have bartered a classical nose, or even a pair of fine eyes, for a touch of Rob Cameron's personal



charm? The soberest forgot his failings, looking in his face. Such men, fickle of fancy, changeable in humor, sanguine by temperament, full of fine impulses out-fought at every onset by irresolution, win more love than they deserve.

Janet's self-possession returned by degrees as they walked on and talked of the changes that had taken place in the town. Her heart was throbbing, but her voice was under control.

"Neta," he exclaimed at length, falling naturally into the use of the name that had been dear to him in the past. "Look at me! Let me look into your eyes. I have dreamed of this meeting many times; of coming back and having the whole atrocious misunderstanding cleared up. And *you*? . . . Whatever I have done, whatever I have been," he went on earnestly, as she did not reply, "you know one thing—I have always told you the truth, haven't I? I never deceived you. I never told you half the story, nor will I now. Listen. For months I've had this on my mind—for months, oh! longer!—the hour when I could come to you, and—and make a clean breast of past follies, and—and see if you wouldn't give me another chance. I don't deserve any mercy at your hands, and it's presumption to ask it after—after I slipped so far away from your sweet influence; but I have never ceased to love you, to hold you the noblest woman on earth. At times I felt that I should never dare to come and tell you life's a blank without you. But when I remembered your eyes, they seemed to beckon me. I wrote you letters by the ream—and tore them up. I couldn't talk on paper. Then I waited every month for Uncle Si to get better, but he grew worse. Then I was forced to take his place at the office. Then he died, and, while things were being

settled up, I kept counting the days till I could get away. Milly never knew the loadstone that was drawing me east. Tell me, tell me," he entreated, "am I still anything to you?"

They were sitting on the rock overlooking the beach, a spot crowded with old associations. As he put his last question, he took her hand, and held it gently in his own.

"Some women," he persisted, "never forget. They love but once. And I have always pictured you——"

"As one of those?" she quietly concluded for him.

She was looking at him now. He fancied she was almost laughing at him.

"You loved me once?"

"Did I?" more slowly. "Yes, I did. Oh! Robert, if we could only go back, go back to the day when we stood here, with so much faith in each other. We can never be the same again."

"Why not?" he asked almost impatiently. "Why couldn't we? I loved you then, but ten thousand times more now. I am not worthy, darling, of your love, but—it is the only thing in God's world I care for—and—and I need it. I have been weak, aye, wicked heretofore, but now I do not fear the future, with you. Life was so different out West. I was lonely, homesick, at first. It was up-hill work at the office and then, at last, I got in with a rough set, real jolly fellows, but quite different from the men you know."

"And these new friends made you forget the old?" she said, soberly. "I'm sorry, Robert."

"Oh, no, no, no!" he protested. "But I didn't see my way ahead. I just drifted and drifted, and then your letters grew cold, I thought—indifferent to our future. At least you never mentioned it,"

"Because you didn't."

"Didn't I? Well, I thought you'd make allowances. But one idea did struggle for expression, through all my vicious adjectives—my longing to hold you just as I held you on that last day. Did you think I'd forgotten that?"

"I did."

"And I—was kissing your picture twenty times a day. Then, I had no money."

"You know I never thought of that. I fancied that you would settle out there, like your uncle. As time went by, our relationship seemed to grow very uncertain. I could not bear suspense, and so—I wrote."

"And then," he added, soberly, "I insulted another woman, by asking her, in a fit of pique, to marry me. I should have thought you understood the significance of that remarkably juvenile performance. Never shall I forget the night I got your letter. I was going to the Fourth Regiment's ball with Tracy, 'one of the boys.' I can never recollect exactly what ensued beyond the fact that, standing tragically before the mirror, I assured myself that there was no one in the world to care now what I did, and I didn't care what became of me."

"Oh, Robert!"

"What did you think I'd do?" he demanded, almost fiercely, tilting back his hat with the gesture she remembered so well. All the time he was watching her closely. The spell of her influence was over him once more. His love was tinctured with a form of veneration, but he was powerless to voice his exaltation. "I didn't want Tom, Dick or Harry to come and tell you that I was not held in high esteem out there," he explained. "At times I grew reckless. Will you not tolerate me and let me try to win your love again?"

You've no idea how easy it would be to manage me. When I think what a mess I've made of the business myself, I am more than half prepared to endorse the Captain's frequently-expressed opinion, that I need a guardian. But now," he added, wistfully, "I've told you everything. With you I stand a chance of reflecting credit on the family still. Without you I am likely to—well—do something very different."

Such dependence touched her. It is a delightful sensation for a woman to hear that she and she alone has power to shape her lover's life at will, even though reason and precedent unite to tell her that a withdrawal of this guidance is not as certain to cause his wreck and ruin as he would have her think. There was no hesitation in her tone as she began :

"You have been very candid with me, Robert, and I will be the same with you. Your interests were all out there. I did not want your engagement to me to be a stumbling-block. You knew I could not leave father. But, though I felt all this, I could not write and say, 'Your love will never stand the test of separation, therefore let us break our boy-and-girl agreement.' I was too proud to put it on that ground, and I always hoped you would read between the lines that I loved you." She looked away as she ceased speaking.

"Had I but understood," he sighed. "If I had not been so positive it was indifference made you crave your freedom, I should have been here long ago. Shall I tell you," he continued, forcing her to meet his eyes, "what finally began to make me think that I might win you, after all?"

There was a pause.

"Because you threw Neal over."

"Robert!"

"It is true. As if I didn't know what a good fellow he is! How much you've been with him! Remember, I corresponded with Aunt Penelope. Such persistence, such devotion, were sure to win in the long run if there hadn't been——"

"If there hadn't been?" she repeated, smiling in spite of herself.

"If there hadn't been someone else in your mind."

"And that particular person?"

"Was me," he returned with ungrammatical haste. "You have admitted it." His eyes, full of tender yearning, pleaded mutely with her. She trembled and sought to withdraw the hand he held. She never knew exactly how it happened, but in another instant he had her in his arms and was covering her lips and eyes with kisses.

It was one of those critical moments in which Cupid revels. That rather laughable thing, love, has a trick of showing us its omnipotence when, like a flash of lightning, it rends asunder the determinations and the dreads of years in half the twinkling of an eye.

But there was something almost pitiful in her attempt to make him understand the overspreading fear that haunted the background of her pictured future. When the first transports of love renewed were over, his confession of past folly disturbed her. It was so extremely vague. He had not even hinted at his master-failing. It was extremely hard for her to put this into words. Her face was scarlet, but she finally made him understand.

"Of course, I know that in your own mind you have no idea but that you can—can—overcome it, Robert. No man in the beginning, ever believed that—oh!

Robert—that—drink was going to prove his master, but—but—it's such a frightful risk to run ! ”

“ You are right,” he returned, “ and I am glad you spoke of this, because—because . . . can you believe that any man in his senses, as happy as I am going to be, with every incentive on earth to do the right thing, is going to—well—return to his old habits ? You have too much sense, I know, to have any fear on that score. So long as I was not accountable, I acknowledge I made many slips. But such a thing will be no longer possible if you will have it otherwise.”

“ Marriage,” she faltered, “ does not always effect so much.”

“ It will in my case. Put me to any pledge. I'll bind myself with the proverbial pound of flesh. Ask any promise and I'll more than keep it. Still better, trust me, darling. The simple fact that you love me, and expect good things of me, will work out my salvation. How little do you understand, my sweet, how different you are from other women ! ”

The sun was setting as they started homeward.

“ You have not said a word about your cousin,” said Janet, as they sighted the town.

“ Milly ? I think you'll like her. She is an awfully good child. I took her for a walk this afternoon. She's very grateful if you do anything for her.”

“ Neal likes her very much.”

“ Yes ? When do you expect Edna ? ”

“ On the twelfth.”

“ If Edna fills her childhood's promise I fancy she and Milly will be first-rate friends, though they are so dissimilar.”

“ Edna's a woman now, not the mischievous little thing you knew,”

"She is your sister," laughed Robert.

Before they said good-night, he wanted Janet formally to ratify her surrender.

"Not to-night, Robert. I'd rather not to-night. I want to think about it all."

"You won't take back what you have said?"

"No."

"And, Neta, if people tell you the solemn truth about my follies, no matter how black it is, I'll stand or fall by it. But I don't like fancy pictures of my faults. I haven't an enemy in the world, that I know of. No one would talk to injure me. *He* will be anxious, even solicitous, about your happiness, and I respect him all the more for it."

"'He'—who?"

"Why, Neal, of course. I know he and Aunt Penelope have held an inquest over my iniquities—I tell you people who haven't got the knack of going wrong themselves are fore-ordained preachers, against us frailer mortals. Neal's a tremendously good fellow, trustworthy, conscientious, transparent as daylight. Whatever he says behind my back, he'll stick to to my face. I understand him—just how he feels about me from his somewhat sanctified standpoint. All that remains for me to do or say, is to show him that his good old tu-whit! tu-whoo! is as mad as moonshine. He'll come round all right in the long run. He called on you last night and warned you I was at hand. What else? . . . Well, never mind. I don't believe, poor fellow, he'll ever marry. When you and I start housekeeping, he can come often, and we will cheer him up, and let him preach and go about at large, a guest with the freedom of the house."

They were standing at the corner of Janet's street.

Twilight, fast falling, cloaked the bright expression of her eyes, but her gentle words went straight to the young man's heart.

"You do not know how this pleases me, Robert. You might have felt so differently about Neal. It—it—makes me love you more."

"You mean I might resent his poor opinion of myself? My glib and voluble brother translated it to me last night, doubtless that I might 'see myself as others see me;' but there's no man alive I respect more highly. I've often pictured him at the winning-post—you in his home—and I, a graceless ne'er-do-well, hopelessly in love with my cousin's wife. I wonder how you would have treated me."

"As Cæsar's wife," she laughed.

He squeezed the fingers that nestled on his arm.

Light of heart, Janet ran up the steps. She knew that her father would scold her for her late home-coming, but his fault-finding could not touch her to-night.

"Thank Heaven, Edna will be here soon!" he growled. "She's always careful of her blind old father's comfort."

"You were asleep, father, when I went out, and the girls did not go till half-past five."

"How do you know? You're a reckless manager, Janet, a reckless manager, as your Aunt Lydia says. Those girls actually walk all over you, and you don't know it."

Without replying to this insinuation, she put her hand on his shoulder with grave tenderness.

"I am sorry if I seemed neglectful. Come, I will make you some muffins for tea."

"Don't," he said testily; "I have no appetite. You'd



better make the muffins for Neal. You're very fond of doing things for others."

"For Neal?" cried the daughter, in surprise.

"Yes, I invited him to tea. He was here a while ago."

"Anything particular?" Neal seldom called in the afternoon.

"Nothing. He left a book for you. It's on the table, I believe."

It was Emerson's "Essay on Friendship." Taking it to the window, she saw that many passages were marked. Glancing through it, she read:—"A friend is a person with whom I may be sincere, before whom I may think aloud." Then, pencilled on the margin, "The spirit that prompted last night's outspokenness. Am I forgiven?"

Poor Neal! She must have a long talk with him, and inspire him with a more cheerful view of the future. Beginning already to word the clinching argument that should refute his fears, she went into the kitchen.

No sooner had she lighted the lamp than a quick step sounded on the gravelled walk. She opened the door and stepped out on the back porch.

"Why, Neal, how delightfully informal! Were you coming in this way?"

"I won't come in to-night, Janet, not to-night."

"Father said you were coming to tea."

"No. But I want to speak to you a moment. I thought you would expect me."

"I did. I wish you would come in."

"Not to-night." He leaned one arm on the railing, and, even by that dim light, she could see the suffering depicted on his face.

"Neal, you stay indoors too much; you work too

hard. You——” But his good-humored laugh stopped her.

“You are not making fun of me? . . . Janet, you were out all the afternoon.”

“Yes, I went over to the homestead for father, and,” she continued, “came in for a round scolding when I got back.” She seldom made light of her father’s humors and Neal looked at her critically.

“Edna’s coming on the twelfth,” she said, abruptly, after a pause.

“I am very glad, for your father’s sake.”

“And mine?” She spoke lightly, strangely relieved that he did not question her about the doings of the day.

“Her return means more responsibility for you,” he said.

Moved by a sudden impulse, she went down the few steps that divided them and put a light hand on his arm.

“I found the little book you left for me. I want to have a long, long talk. You are a little hard, I think, but I know you meant everything you said last night for my good—I’m perfectly certain of that—if—if—you didn’t convince me. You want me to be happy—I am going to be. Perhaps you think I have very little that is tangible to lay hold of, but we’re not all made happy by the same things—are we——”

“No—no, assuredly not,” he rejoined quickly, feeling that he could not stand there another moment and preserve his composure. “I mustn’t keep you out here. Tell your father I couldn’t stay, Janet.”

“When shall I see you again?”

“Very soon. Good-night. God bless you.”

Alone in her own room that night, she reviewed the

events of the last few hours. Her prayer for a life-work had been surely answered. The man she loved was easily influenced for good or evil. Heretofore the latter had prevailed. But now the past was dead—dead and buried.

“He is the soul of truth,” whispered Love. “Make him feel that your happiness is in the hollow of his hand. Bring all the power of a righteous influence, all that ennobles life, to bear—and save him—save him from himself.”

Thus she arrived, by a woman’s illogical reasoning, at the conclusion that what she ardently longed to do was what she ought to do.

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## CHAPTER VII.

A LARGE stone house, built in the old colonial style of architecture, on rising ground, surrounded by some eight or ten acres, rich in great trees whose infancy dated back into the history of the early colonies, abounding in beautiful walks and little unexpected miniature hills, that afforded exquisite outlooks over the long stretches of velvety lawns dotted here and there with clustering banks of variegated green ; such was the home of Captain Cameron.

Nowhere, in that section of the state, could there be found a place that combined such glory of age and pleasing aspect thoroughly preserved.

From the entrance gate with its carved stone piers, surmounted by a wrought-iron arch, the wide paved walk, bordered on either side by majestic elms, led

up to the old house. The front door opened into a spacious hall. Quaint, high, spindle-leg chairs, comfortable rockers, and rugs were scattered about, for this was where the family ordinarily assembled.

A cheery wood fire crackled in the fireplace, casting its red glow on the large oaken panels in the wall and even faintly outlining the stairway, with its turned and twisted balustrade and newel post, further back in the shadow.

The nights being still chilly, Captain Cameron drew his big chair closer to the genial warmth and as the twilight deepened, sat apparently absorbed in contemplation of the burning wood. What pictures he saw in the firelight! Retrospect with him was essentially pleasant, therefore he seized upon the flitting scenes that danced before him in the red haze with all the enjoyment that these glances into the past are wont to bring us. Troops of familiar faces thronged about him, carrying him back to the day when he had stood for the first time under the starlight on the broad ocean. He heard again the stern commands of the ship's officers, the rugged, weather-worn face of the captain standing out most prominently. He smiled and chuckled in gleeful satisfaction as he remembered what sheer audacity and perseverance had gained for the sturdy, dauntless New England boy, following his advancement in fancy till a thrill of the old-time exultation of spirit touched him once more. With the memory of his promotion as first-mate of the vessel, he saw himself, later, a welcome guest in the friendly captain's home and the odor of roses and the sound of a girl's sweet laughter breathed around him. He saw the roses exchanged for orange blossoms, the laughter for the gay

ringing of marriage bells. Time rolled on. A passing cloud crossed the scene, in the death of the old sea-captain, whose daughter had been his wife; but fortune smiled and prosperity attended him without interruption, till the brightness was again obscured in a second opening of the family vault, to receive the body of his young wife.

The fire smouldered for an instant, when lo ! with a little gust of wind, the flames lapped about a fresh log. In the new light he saw another face, a fair, girlish face, crowned with sunny curls. He saw the interior of another home, her home. He saw her surrounded by her people, the old folks, the self-reliant elder sister and the dark-haired younger one, who had been such a foil to her own blonde beauty. Merrily crackled the burning wood. The scene changed once more. He was on the ocean in command of his ship, his pretty second wife by his side, holding in her arms his son, his eldest boy, with eyes as blue as her own.

He settled back in his chair now, and turned his face from the fire. He had no wish to dwell upon the occurrence that had made him again a widower. Twenty years or more had rolled themselves between it and the present, but he never could forget that both wives had defied him by deliberately and inconsiderately taking themselves out of the world. It was the one grievance that he held against the two women who had borne his name. They had been so singularly docile, so gentle in manner, so strikingly similar in their veneration for himself, that with the lapse of years he often found it difficult to disassociate them, the more especially as they had both answered to the Christian name of Helen. He had grieved for Helen Randle in a

manner quite to be expected, but his grief for Helen Railson had contained an added element of half-angry protest, when he looked at his two boys, and saw, ahead, visions of governesses and nurses and countless other questions attending their early growth and development, all thrust upon him to settle. The nursery was a woman's sphere. In view of his new responsibility, however, he had decided to abandon the sea. Already quite a land proprietor, in the possession of his first wife's maiden home, he had turned his attention to the improvement of real estate about him. Having made several extensive and prudent purchases, he had built in all directions, thereby increasing his income year by year, till people had come to have a very wholesome respect if not affection for the wealthy owner of Randlemeade. A month or two after his second wife's death, Captain Cameron brought to the town his white-haired mother. Being an exceedingly meek little woman, with a disposition to adore the son of whom she had never asked the slightest favor, she had speedily stepped into the small corner in his fine home that he desired her to occupy, shrinking, with time, in size and individuality, till she had become little more than a shadow, flitting about the big rooms, where the Captain's word had become the most inflexible law.

But the sweetest rose holds also the prickling thorn, and the best regulated household generally owns to disturbing elements. The Captain was absolute master, but he was not exempt from certain irritations and petty annoyances that, in his opinion, some women are sent into the world solely to provoke.

Impulse had prompted him one day, many years before, to send a graciously-written invitation to his first

wife's sister to visit her old home. She was the only member of the Randle family left and some faint idea that a little courtesy shown to this last surviving descendant of the old man who had given him such a start in life was to be expected of him, had overcome his distaste for the society of a woman almost a stranger to him, and the invitation had gone.

He had thought of that letter frequently during the eighteen years that had elapsed since he had penned it, picturing the tranquillity of spirit and absence of unpleasant controversies that would have made these eighteen years conspicuous, if it had travelled to the dead-letter office instead of taking its unerring way to a certain fashionable boarding-house, in a fashionable quarter of a large city, and falling into the hands of the person addressed. Elinore Randle had been on the shady side of thirty at the time of her return to her former home, from which her elder sister's marriage had deposed her. She had been quite different from the little white-haired lady who had preceded her, and her brother-in-law had found that it was by no means as easy to map out her course, curtail her speeches, and remove her presence, in the twinkling of an eye, when he wished to be alone. Any hint on his part as to eventual departure had been received with tearful protests and spasmodic clinging to the boys, whose companionship and affection at these critical moments had appeared something more than human. By a series of masterly movements, she had cleared away the old Scotch housekeeper, and assumed the position herself. The Captain had stormed and thundered in his loudest tones against the novel experience of brooking the presence of a person for whose society he had at times a positive aversion, but fears and fainting spells,

followed by the timid offering of some little gift of her own making, had always brought about a moody surrender and acquiescence.

Sitting in the twilight, but slight resemblance to his sons could be traced in his strongly-marked features. They had inherited his fine physique, broad shoulders, and full chest, but neither of them showed the same strength of will and tenacity of purpose that were graven so vividly around the Captain's closely-shaven mouth and massive chin. The natural covering on the top of his well-developed head having entirely disappeared, he had long worn a silky wig, which gave him an unnaturally youthful look, contrasting oddly with his shaggy eyebrows. In the matter of dress, he was given to rather startling effects; but no one ever ventured to criticize his taste, whether he bought cravats of rainbow tints or took to wearing patent leather shoes.

With one hand, now, he was slowly stroking the arm of the chair in which he lounged, wondering for the hundredth time what good, bad, or indifferent fate fortune held in reserve for his happy-go-lucky son whom a curious chance had sent home again. He was forced to consider the young man as once more an inmate of his house, and therefore fell to planning and arranging, with the assurance of one in the habit of having his suggestions acted on.

He looked at his watch. It wanted but five minutes to five. At five o'clock tea was always served here. Miss Randle had wrested his consent to this diurnal ceremony. He hated tea, but had come to look forward to a glass or two of wine at this precise hour as an appetizer for his seven-thirty dinner. The curtains at the door parted, and he turned a rather forbidding countenance on the person approaching—a wasp-like



figure, robed in pearl-gray silk, with fluttering bows of crimson ribbon. A woman's face surmounted this combination, with hair and complexion marvellous, if not altogether natural. With a little start, Miss Randle plaintively exclaimed,

"Oh! Oliver!"

"Oh! Fiddlesticks! Elinore, I am no ghost. You jump like a jack-in-the-box every time you enter one's room lately. Why don't you have some mercy on the people's nerves who are inside?"

"I thought you were out, Oliver. I am so easily startled."

Rather ungraciously drawing up a chair to the small inlaid stand, upon which the tea-service was arranged, the Captain inquired about his sons. His sister-in-law settled, dove-like, in her chair and preened her furbelows before replying.

"Robert went over to his aunt's immediately after luncheon and Laurie went away shortly after." Ringing for the tea, she continued, when the girl had retired: "Can't I induce you to take tea with me, Oliver? You're so good to humor me in this fancy of mine, so very good; but I was always childish—won't you share my pleasure?"

He was accustomed to this urging, and treated it with silent contempt. Proceeding to pour out his glass of wine, he suddenly bethought him that some one was missing.

"Where's mother?"

"Taking a nap."

"Why didn't you call her? In the name of common sense, what is the matter with the family? If it's your wish to come here and daily lay the foundation for an old age of dyspeptic agony, have the goodness to

understand that I insist, at least, on the civility of punctuality ! ”

“ I know, Oliver, you hate delay ; but she insists on napping.”

Letting the sugar tongs fall on the heavy tray with a playful clang, she hastened from the room, returning presently with an attenuated little lady leaning on her arm.

Mrs. Cameron, maintaining her hold on life by the slenderest thread possible, possessed but two distinct ideas ; one being that her semi-venerable son was still a young man : the other, that Elinore Randle was his first wife. In her own mind she was living over again a certain early visit that she had made to Randlemeade in the first days of her son’s residence there. Periodically seeking the Captain and his supposed wife, she would bid them an affecting farewell, and, after a pretence of collecting her possessions, she would appear the next morning at breakfast, comfortably disposed to repeat her visit, beginning it with the customary inquiries that visitors are wont to make on their arrival. Though her innocent chatter upon these misleading ideas was often embarrassing, the Captain graciously humored her.

“ Two more trunks of Robert’s came this afternoon,” remarked Miss Randle, as soon as the old lady had dropped off to sleep in her arm-chair, with a quarter-full tea-cup in her hand, as was her invariable custom. The Captain still maintained a dead silence.

“ I’m quite anxious, Oliver, to see the cousin he has brought with him. Laurie would tell me nothing, except that she’s small. But that’s a characteristic of the family, isn’t it ? ”

“ What ? ”

"Small, short women."

"Yes, and womanly silence is a characteristic of the family too!"

She put down her cup suddenly and stretching her arm across the table that separated them, tapped him playfully on the hand. There was something so comically incongruous in the action, that the Captain actually blushed and timidly moved back his chair.

"Think, Oliver, wouldn't you be lonely if I wasn't here to talk to you? What would you do if I was deaf and dumb; of course," she added, hastily, "you'd soon learn to talk to me on your fingers. Dear me, I'm just like a child. I'm so thankful I can please people."

It was singular, but only in the most glaring light could the wrinkles in her face be detected. Silver hairs had made their appearance, with other indications of old age, but she well understood how to conceal these marks. She had a number of wonderful little jars and bottles and dyes and different kinds of powders secreted in her room, with whose beautifying powers she had not been acquainted in her girlhood. Her ambition, like her youth, seemed undying. No siege in the history of the world ever held a stronger element of dogged persistence than her bombardment of the Captain's heart.

Out of doors, the sweet, fresh air of an early spring twilight was beginning to stir. To the right of the house, branching off from the main drive, ran a narrow path through a small thicket of trees, that led into an unfrequented street. On the edge of these woods stood a rickety cottage, a lonely spot, for not even the roof of the big stone house beyond was observable, owing to the density of the trees, and the village was

almost a mile distant. A certain air of neglect pervaded the front door-yard. A gate unhinged, a broken window-pane, a little cast-off shoe in the front yard, indicated careless habits on the part of the tenants.

Leaning languidly against the gate was a tall, slender girl, gazing into the blackness of the woods beyond. Tenderness, anger, scorn, fought for the mastery on her expressive countenance. The bright color on her face, lighted up by a pair of glowing dark eyes, the grace and symmetry of her form, would have delighted a disciple of Titian. Indeed, these were the characteristics that had won the admiration of Laurie Cameron. On his return from abroad, he had discovered this sylvan queen and could scarcely believe it possible that little saucy-tongued Kathie Felton had been thus strikingly transformed.

The brown cottage belonged to his father. The Feltons were pensioners of the Captain. Honest John Felton had been employed at Randlemeade for many years, while his wife, a worthless woman, was, when not off on one of her periodical sprees, frequently engaged by Miss Randle for extra work at "the great house." Kate was the eldest of the family, and the only power that kept even the semblance of a home. Ezra, nearly as old as his sister, was one of those irresponsible freaks of nature which villages produce at times. Intense love for his sister and an abiding deadly animosity to any one who caused her pain, were the alternate winds that swayed him. Every action, thought, desire, centred round these ruling instincts. If the girl understood the depth of her brother's attachment, it never called forth more than a careless caress, or a light laugh.

Kate Felton abhorred her home, despised her pov-

erty, hated the work and responsibility forced upon her; but she loved her father and her baby sister, an impish mite of four, and for their sakes she kept her murmurs for her mother's ear alone.

The moon was slowly rising. She could see it as it appeared over in the direction of the village. This hour, this beautiful twilight hour, was all her own. Picking up a little shawl of Teenie's from the front steps, she slipped it across her shoulders, passed through the gate, and walked thoughtfully down the lane. The sound of footsteps attracted her attention. She listened, and strained her eyes, but the darkness was falling very fast. The steps were familiar, but now she could distinguish voices. Leaving the path, she plunged into the woods, and stood breathless in the dark shade, waiting to catch what the men, rapidly nearing her place of concealment, were saying.

"No," said a voice she knew so well, "upon my word I don't. You haven't seen her yet. She's grown wonderfully handsome, but the idea of marrying her——"

"Oh, of course. But didn't you give her to believe you were in earnest?"

How the girl struggled to catch the answer! It came clear and distinct in the night air.

"No, no. I gave her credit for too much common sense. It's her own fault, though, if she's unhappy. What can I do?"

That was all. She could not understand the rest, for they had passed on, but she felt as if suddenly turned to stone. She drew her breath with difficulty, and a half sob escaped her dry lips. Without warning, a hand touched her arm—and she started back with a sharp cry.

"It's only me, Kathie. I didn't move before, for

fear it would make you speak. I wanted you to hear."

"Ezra, how you frightened me! Why will you go prowling round in such a sneaky fashion?"

"I've been following him," he retorted, as they emerged from the woods.

"Him? Who?" she asked sharply.

"You know, Kathie. I know. I heard what he said; so did you, but I heard more than you. They were smoking down there in the lane and I was right near the fence. Mr. Robert is going to marry Miss Morvick, Kathie. I heard him tell it. She's good, and I'm glad," said the boy, in an excited whisper. As they neared their own gate, he turned with an unexpected movement, his white face looking ghastly in the moonlight.

"Wait, Kathie, only a little while. He shall pay for making you unhappy. I know what's on that blue ribbon round your neck. I've seen you kiss it."

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## CHAPTER VIII.

THE following morning, after the family had breakfasted, Robert sought the Captain, a proceeding which that gentleman considered most opportune, for having arrived at several conclusions regarding the young man's pecuniary affairs, he only awaited the opportunity to make these plans known, and have them acted upon. Every forenoon it was his custom to spend a few hours in the library among his books, not always reading, perhaps, but attending to his correspondence, and looking over the items of daily household expenditure.

Robert closed the door behind him, and lazily

stretched himself in one of the big leather chairs that stood near his father's desk. The place had not altered in the least, he reflected, since the well-remembered days when a summons to enter this dreaded apartment had made his boyish heart quake within him. He looked up, half expecting still, to see the long birch rod that had lain in threatening attitude on the top of an old frame far above his head—but it was gone and only the childish faces of himself and his brother smiled down upon him.

The Captain having at last sealed the letter that his son's entrance had found him writing, turned around in his chair, and regarded the young man half expectantly.

"Finished?" said the latter carelessly. "Will you smoke? Bad habit? Of course I agree with you. Indeed I'm disposed to agree with every one this morning. Presuming that you still have some interest in my actions, I thought I'd tell you, before some one else does, that I'm going to be married. That is, I think I am."

Striking a match with sudden violence, he allowed it to go out without using it, while he watched the surprised expression that his abrupt announcement had brought to his companion's face. "A little sudden, isn't it,—but it's true."

"May I inquire whom you intend to marry?" asked the Captain, deliberately. "Your cousin, I suppose: but what induced you to bring her on here first?"

"Milly? Oh! no. John Morvick's daughter, Janet Morvick. You know her?"

"I've heard of her family."

"And you've seen Janet, too, I'm sure," continued his son, rather more positively than was pleasant to his

father's ear. "Of course, you understand, I've always known her. In point of fact I asked her to marry me just eight years ago this coming month."

"Indeed! And she refused you, then?" said the other and his tone further implied, "because you had nothing."

"No, she didn't. We were engaged before I went away, but no one knew of it. I expected, if you remember, to return much sooner."

"But," interrupted the Captain, "acting upon the principle that has governed you all your life, that of never doing what you had intended to do, you failed as usual to put in an appearance. She's much more constant than the average woman."

"She's everything that's good and noble," said the young man, enthusiastically. "Of course our engagement was broken. My own fault entirely, as you can easily believe. I asked Belle to marry me then. You heard of that? I never knew myself exactly why I did it. I think her father had an idea that I needed some restraint, and he fancied matrimony would have the desired effect. In short, he planned that Belle should reform me. But if she ever shared his ambition, she never did more than indelibly impress upon my mind the length and breadth and depth of my deficiencies. We were formally engaged about two months, or sixty days, and I may venture to say that thirty-five days of that time we were not on speaking terms. A pleasant state of affairs sometimes, perhaps, but when a man's engaged he rather looks for a different order of things. But," he broke in abruptly, "why the deuce am I telling you all this?"

"It isn't very much to your credit."

"Decidedly not," said his son, with a good-humored



laugh. "I've lost time and opportunities, I grant you, and by no means deserve what I've got."

"Why didn't you remain and continue your uncle's business? It would have been wiser to have kept the money there. I wrote you to that effect."

"Yes,—but, for more reasons than one, I preferred to throw it up. Ronaldson was only too eager to take it, and he got it cheap too."

"You mean your uncle's cashier? It was a poor move on your part, Robert, but quite characteristic. This young woman, I presume, was the cause. For all short-sighted and unbusiness-like actions a woman is generally to blame."

"I won't argue the question, only I know that in obeying the instinct that drew me back here, I stand at this moment many degrees nearer amounting to something than I should ever have done out there. I will surprise you all. I'm not a love-sick boy, pursuing a chimera of impossible happiness. I feel like a man that's been shipwrecked and rescued in thus drifting back to her. It isn't often a man meets his ideal."

"And you haven't met or been in communication for six or seven years? Is this the old estimate of her character, or one formed since your return? If the former, you were indeed reckless to run the risk of losing so incomparable a life companion."

"I beg your pardon," said the young man, with a sudden return to his habitual manner of speaking to his father. "I forgot that you've cut out one type of womankind, and model every female of your acquaintance in the same mould. Actions speak louder than words, and actions must convince you, after a time, of my sincerity."

The Captain's gaze wandered to the bright, beautiful

face on the wall, over Robert's head. The latter had left his seat, and was pacing back and forth before the fireplace. So many little gestures, his eyes, and an indescribable way he had of regarding you while he talked, brought back the dead most vividly to his father's remembrance. A certain dim sense that this resemblance was very agreeable, made him look at his son more intently, as he remarked in a tone positively cordial for him,

"I will say, Robert, I'm glad you're going to marry. The young woman I know nothing about; but since she's been the means of your return, I hope she'll have you, and tie you down to one place. I've no respect for rolling stones. Settle down, and settle here at Randlemeade. . . . There's room enough here for half-a-dozen more."

"Oh! I've no thought of bringing Janet here. I don't think she'd fancy the idea at all, even if there were not reasons why it would be impossible.

"I fancy," he said at length, as the Captain made no reply to his last hasty expression, "I fancy I'll build or buy. Her father and sister, you know, will live with us."

"Indeed! You'll commence with a family, then?"

"I've plenty to keep them. I'd adopt every relative she ever had, for the sake of getting her."

This was the Captain's opportunity. His elder son had, when very young, betrayed a disposition to allow his generosity to play disastrously with his purse strings, which lack of prudence his father thoroughly deplored.

With all the eloquence he could command, therefore, he now sought to impress on the young man the wisdom of "reforming altogether," his past failings. It took him two hours.

As the clock struck eleven, Robert made his escape to the stables.

In the afternoon he ordered a horse saddled, and started for a ride through some of his old haunts.

Nearly every person he passed had a cordial welcome for him. He began to feel that people were glad to see him. Even the old blacksmith's hearty words were gratifying, and as he turned the pony's head off from the main street and started more briskly out into the country, he began to imagine the position he would hold some few years hence. People would point to him then, and say: "We were very sceptical about that young man in the beginning, but our predictions regarding him have failed absolutely." These fancies had a tendency to separate the present and past very widely. The mistakes and wrong-doings of the latter period were being thrust so far behind him that it required an effort to remember now that he had ever been anything else but a man of the most tender conscience.

Bringing the pony again to a walk, he noticed a man with a peculiar halting gait a little way in advance. A moment's thought suggested that it might be John Morvick. To slip from the saddle, and lead his horse up to the path, was the work of an instant. The other, conscious of his approach, stopped and put out his cane.

"Mr. Morvick, I suppose you've forgotten my voice, if you haven't forgotten Rob Cameron! I'm awfully glad I overtook you." Seizing the blind man's hand, he shook it warmly.

"Robert Cameron! Oh! yes, yes, to be sure! I know your voice. I heard a horse behind me, and then your speaking suddenly startled me like. I'm no

better you see, Robert, no better than when you left home. But I do manage to get out a bit by myself nowadays. I can find my way easily to Lydia's. Since the child's been away I don't have much company in my walks."

"I suppose you mean Edna? She's coming home soon, I understand? Are you going to the homestead now? If so, with your permission, I'll go a little way with you."

"I didn't know you were home till this morning," said the old man after a pause. "Janet said you'd arrived unexpectedly."

"Yes, I saw your daughter yesterday afternoon."

"Did ye? She didn't mention it. She's very close-mouthed, is Janet. As her aunt Lydia says, the other is very different from her."

"Edna? I fancy they are different."

"As day and night," declared the blind man, with an emphasis that could not be misunderstood. "You'll hardly know my little one, Robert."

"No doubt. Eight years can change us all. Do you know, Mr. Morvick, you're being so fond of both your daughters, unlike though they are, makes it painful, I suppose, for you to think of giving either of them away? And yet I'm going to ask for one now."

"Ask for one? You—you—haven't seen her, Robert. She's—she's—only a little girl."

"I saw her yesterday."

"Oh! Janet?" The relief with which he breathed the name made the young man smile.

"Yes, Janet."

"You—you—you mean that you want to marry Janet?"

"I do," said the other slowly, not considering it

necessary to go into details. "I've loved her always. I'm in a position to keep a wife now, and it's my intention to have one as soon as I can get her."

"She's old enough to be married," faltered the blind man, still very much startled, "but I'd made up my mind that Janet would never marry. Her aunt Lydia believed she wouldn't, too. I'm very helpless, Robert. What's to become of me and the little one? This is extraordinary. Janet should have prepared me; she should have prepared me." His hands began to tremble.

"You don't suppose I'd separate you. I'd no more think of doing that than I'd deprive you of your right hand this moment. Our home will be your home and Edna's while you live, and till she marries. As for Janet telling you about it, she hasn't given me a positive answer yet, but I hope the idea isn't unpleasant to you."

"Unpleasant, Robert? No, I think not, I think not. But, I grant you, it seems queer to think of Janet getting married. Not but that a good many might not want her," he continued, deciding that he must not disparage her worth to the man disposed at present to value it so highly. "She's unquestionably a capable woman, as her aunt Lydia says. If she is a bit given to having her own way, she's relieved me in my affliction very much, and under my direction has kept our little home together quite comfortably."

Robert rather doubted the fact of Janet's ever having received any practical assistance from the man at his side, but he only said that he understood well all that he would win when he gained her.

The lane leading up to the homestead appearing just ahead, he announced his intention of going back,

Learning, as he again grasped his prospective father-in-law's hand, that he intended to take supper with Mrs. Durward, Robert galloped homeward, determined to lose no time in embracing this opportunity of finding his love alone.

Her father very rarely spent an evening away from home, and to-night, when the girls had gone, Janet found the silence of the sitting-room more grateful than usual. A bowl of violets stood on the piano. Through the parted curtains a glimmer of sunlight shone on a colored screen. Everywhere her delicate touch and refinement were noticeable.

Feeling that Robert would come over later, she had changed her ordinary dress for a soft gray cashmere. In her belt she had fastened a deep red rose. She could not read, so she sat down at the piano, and began to play an old Scotch song that Neal had whistled for her one night.

Suddenly her hands dropped from the keys and she turned a startled face upon a dark figure close behind her.

"Oh! Robert!"

"Did I frighten you? The door was open, and I couldn't resist coming in. I heard you playing."

She rose from the stool, and, in so doing, lessened the distance between them. The color stole back to her cheeks. Without speaking, he came a step closer. In a moment his arms were about her, and their lips met.

"Mine!" he whispered exultingly. "Say yes."

"What need?" she returned, lifting her head, but making no effort to get away. "Oh! Robert, will you always love me?"

"Will I always? My darling, if you could realize what you are to me!"

It was the happiest moment of their lives.

They began to talk about the future. She told him all her thoughts since their last meeting.

"We must expect some disappointments," she said, softly; "some sorrow and anxious hours, because they come to us all. But it seems to me, Robert, if we understand each other, if we help each other, the future holds but little we need fear. You know what Thoreau says: 'If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost. That is where they should be: now put foundations under them.'"

He did not speak, but gently drew her head down to his shoulder. Her words aroused his enthusiasm anew, and intensified his longing to live the life she pictured, far from all unholy influences, or unworthy deeds.

He told her of his recent conversation with her father.

"It startled him awfully. Poor old man! But as soon as he understood that he wouldn't suffer by the change, he came round. But, Neta, you don't want it to be a long engagement, do you? I can't bear to think of your drudging here, when you might get out of it so easily. When do you think it will be?"

But Janet would not name a date.

"Remember," she said, quietly, "you spoke of building, Robert."

"Or buying. It wouldn't take long to do that."

"Well, suppose I say early in September. Don't forget that we haven't been together for a long, long time. In one sense of the word, we have yet to become acquainted. We are both new people, with new traits."

"You will soon know mine, Neta; the disagreeable ones especially. I want you to know just what I am before——"

"I do now," she said hastily, contradicting her previous statement, after the fashion of her sex.

"How happy your father is at the prospect of Edna's coming!"

"Yes, isn't he? She is his greatest happiness.

Janet handed him an album. "You will find a recent photograph of Edna in it."

He held the book for a moment without opening it.

"Now I shall discover if I have any rivals."

He looked at her face, but saw no sign.

"Do you mean to tell me, Neta, that for eight years no one came to see you?"

"Oh! yes, a number of people."

"I mean," he persisted, "no man paid you particular attention, aside from Neal?"

"No one. I don't believe you understand that—that I had no wish to encourage such a thing."

She watched with smiling interest while he closely scrutinized her sister's face.

What a winning face it was, with its saucy eyes, perfect mouth and chin and hair that stood out, even in the picture, rebelliously curly.

"Of course," she said, "the coloring isn't there, and besides I don't think Edna's beauty lies in the mere formation of her features, but in the expressions that flit across her face."

"Her eyes are like yours," he returned, slowly looking from the pictured face to the living one beside him. "The mouth and chin are very similar, and then your faces are both oval. We must watch her or she'll surely break more hearts than one." Closing the album, he suddenly asked, "When did Laurie see her last?"

"Your brother? Let me think, I don't believe he



has seen her since you have. He was away, you know, at college and abroad, and Edna has been at school. But why do you ask?"

"Because my estimable brother always loses his heart to every pretty girl he meets. He is horribly fickle. At present I have an idea he's cultivating Milly. Their acquaintance, as yet, is a matter of hours; but, being cousins, they will get on faster. Somehow," he added, "I wish I hadn't brought Milly here. If Laurie intends to marry her," he continued, after a moment, "it would be as well to let Edna into the plot early."

"Why?" she inquired, rather puzzled.

"A girl generally loses interest in a man if she knows him to be engaged."

"What makes you think Edna would take any interest in him?"

"I don't know. Perhaps she wouldn't. It's only a fancy of mine."

His companion smiled.

"But," she said, "if you regret his sudden interest in your cousin, why do you wish to prevent a transfer of his affections, if they are temporary only?"

"I don't want my little sister-in-law to have her heart broken."

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## CHAPTER IX.

As the days passed, Miss Penelope became more firmly convinced that all the best points of the family—amiability, unselfishness and candor, were centred in the person of her brother's daughter. From her mother the girl had probably inherited her soft brown

eyes and a certain timidity of manner conspicuously absent in the Railsons, but her honesty, her straightforward way of speaking—in fact, every endearing characteristic—Miss Penelope unblushingly described as “Railson traits.” She pointed to her as a sort of composite representative of virtues discovered here and there in all the rest.

This growing affection naturally strengthened her interest in the girl’s future, and visions of Milly, married and settled, already began to illuminate her inner consciousness.

One evening Neal delicately hinted his belief in Milly’s deepening fondness for Laurie.

“The idea, Neal! I don’t believe he’s any more in love with her than you are. Every pretty face attracts him for a time. As for her caring for him—nonsense! I shall make it my business to impress upon her how inconstant he is.”

How far this laudable determination had been carried into practice, Neal did not know. His aunt’s attention was so largely occupied with the future, the present was, in a measure, lost to view. Laurie came and went at all hours. He drove Milly over to Randlemeade frequently. Indeed, a day seldom went by without some little offering or outing.

Milly spent many hours with her aunt. One morning, as they were seated together, Miss Penelope startled her by inquiring how Captain Cameron treated her when she visited Randlemeade.

“Very kindly, aunt. But, do you know, I feel I shall always be afraid of him? He looks so stern and hard to please.”

Miss Penelope smiled, and shook her head.

“I understand what you mean,” she said. “He

impresses a good many people that way, but I never hesitate to speak my mind before him. The last time I ever set foot inside his house, was to go over and give him a little bit of my mind about the boys ; and I don't believe he's ever forgotten it either, though it happened nearly twenty years ago. I remember the day well. Dinah and I had cleaned the west bedroom in the forenoon, the room you occupy now, and Neal cut his finger with a penknife, and came running in to me with his mind and face both screwed up not to cry."

Neal usually figured in Miss Penelope's reminiscences in one way or another. His entrance into her home had always been a sort of chronological era—"before Neal was born," and "after Neal was born," having become the customary formula for reckoning time. Milly brought her back to the subject in hand.

"What about the boys, Aunt Penelope?"

"Oh, yes. As I was saying, the last quarrel was all due to them. After your Aunt Helen died, their father made up his mind he'd bring them up to suit his fancy—and such a training! He knew no more about boys than you do about elephants. I tried every means in my power to influence them for good, as their mother would have done. I whipped them whenever I got a chance and thought they deserved it. I kept them at home as much as I could. Then their father sent me word that he had hired a governess for his sons, and he would take it as a personal favor if I left the task to her. I marched across to see the writer, and told him in very plain English just what I thought of him. The upshot of it was, we worked upon each other's nerves until we both got into a tempestuous rage, and said things that we after-

wards regretted. Of course I never went again. But I still watched over the boys."

"Neal told me the other night," said Milly, after a slight pause, "that Captain Cameron always sends you a present at Christmas, in spite of your disagreement."

"Yes, so he does," said Miss Penelope, slowly counting her pile of socks. "I don't know how many years John Felton has brought over and taken back that very same identical box. I don't know what's in it, but I won't have it, whatever it is."

"It must make him feel badly, Aunt Penelope, to have it returned."

"Then let him stop sending it. I honestly believe, though, he will keep it up till one of us dies. I shouldn't wonder if he has forgotten what's in it himself."

One morning, a few days after this conversation, Laurie called for Milly. Penelope frowned as she watched them drive away. She was thankful Neal was not a girl. There was so much more responsibility attending a girl's settlement in life; so much to consider from the worldly as well as from the moral point of view!

Milly had grown to realize that Laurie was not, for some inexplicable reason, a favorite with either Miss Penelope or Neal. But the knowledge in no way affected her own admiration. At a certain age, the affections are stimulated by opposition; and Milly was fanciful. Cousinly interest deepened into inexplicable sentiment. She did not know it, but she was in love and it was too late for Miss Penelope or Neal or all the world to point to the cloven foot of her idol,

She began to deplore her lack of worldly wisdom and her want of conversational powers. Especially did she regret her ignorance on the subject of the world's great painters. Determined to overcome this, Neal discovered her, one day seated on the steps before his bookcase with Ruskin's "Modern Painters" open on her lap as a beginning. He instantly understood her motive for the selection, and smiled good-humoredly at the little black-robed figure, but offered no comment.

The cart turned off at length from the shore road along which they had been slowly driving. The grassy lane to Randlemeade stretched cheerful in the sun.

"I wonder," said Laurie, gently patting Milly's gloved hand, "I wonder if we still seem like strangers to you. If I may judge by your face, it makes you happy to be here."

Some men are born to be lovers and Laurie was one of these.

"I don't think," he went on, before she could reply, "we can ever let you go back home, and I hope you do not want to. Do you?" he persisted.

"Not now." The words were softly spoken, but he heard them. He touched the pony sharply with the whip.

"It's early: you don't have dinner till one o'clock. Come in the studio a little while. You won't have to talk to the Captain or Aunt Elinore—they are away."

He had taken the reins in both hands. Instinctively she felt that something had annoyed him. Following his gaze she found that he was watching the shrunken figure of a boy, who was crouching near the fence close by, cutting dandelions. A pair of fierce eyes,

gleaming for an instant with intense hatred, watched them as they passed by.

"Did you ever see a more distressed-looking object?" said her companion, when they had left the boy behind them enveloped in a cloud of dust.

"Who is he?"

"John Felton's half-witted son; repulsive to look at, isn't he? The Captain owns the cottage in which they live. I'd be glad to have them move off, if it wasn't that John himself is such a faithful old fellow."

"But the boy is harmless, Cousin Laurie."

"Yes, harmless as far as actual violence is concerned, but offensive to the eye. I always believe that such freaks of nature ought to be kept out of sight, and not allowed to run at large."

"But they'd miss their liberty. They feel as we feel," she returned, shyly.

"Such an imp, Milly, is a blot on this heavenly morning."

He spoke with unusual vehemence. Wonderingly she looked at him, in no sense conscious that, for the moment, he had struck the key-note of his nature. Beauty was his religion, and gratification of the eye his ruling passion.

Half an hour later, his customary calmness restored, and the studio door closed upon them, he signified an ardent wish to sketch her, just as she sat, in his low arm-chair, her big straw hat pushed back, one white hand resting on her black dress, while the other grasped a pair of gloves.

Sitting as he had placed her, she watched with great interest the mystic lines grow under his skilful fingers. It was a beautiful room in which they sat. Full of valuable curios and gorgeous with color.

On the ground floor and attached to the house by a passageway it had the advantage of remoteness and freedom from noise. Several large windows opened on the lawn and there was an outside door also, but this was used only when Laurie's visitors wished to avoid meeting the family. After a few minutes he handed her the rough sketch to criticize.

She immediately perceived that he had flattered her, but she did not say so, for she imagined he was well aware of it.

"The position is delightful," he said, turning over a portfolio. "Let me inscribe the date on it and it shall take its place with these."

"Sketches?" she inquired, with animation. "May I look at them?" He drew a chair close to her side, and proceeded to describe the little bits of rural scenery as she slowly regarded each in their order.

"No figures? Ah, yes, here is one. What a lovely face!" Separating it from the rest, she held up a young girl's head. "What eyes! Cousin Laurie, do you know her?"

"That? Oh! that's a fancy sketch, suggested by a young woman in the neighborhood, but radically idealized." As soon as she had finished her inspection, he suddenly reached over, and before she understood his intention, deliberately tore the head in two,—*"A wretched piece of work, Milly. I thought I had destroyed it long ago."*

He threw the fragments in the waste-paper basket, imagination conjuring up past scenes he would have much preferred to obliterate from his mind.

The minutes flew by. Their hands would often meet, as he pointed out some view to which he had already called attention in their drives. Her face was very near

his own and her lips within easy reach. Moved by a sudden impulse, he abruptly bent his head and kissed them.

Milly's reception of his unexpected caress was a revelation. It placed her at once in a position that no other woman had ever occupied in his estimation before. She did not "rise with dignity;" she did not "demand an apology;" she simply closed the portfolio and reached for her hat, as though struck a sudden blow. The color died out of her face, and tears formed in her eyes.

"Milly, you're not going! Honestly, I couldn't help it. You're not offended? Remember, you're my cousin. Lots of men kiss their cousins, though of course I should have asked permission," he added, hastily. He saw she was trying to speak. Aunt Penelope's words rang in her ears. She forgot everything in her longing to be assured that the suspicion rushing over her was without foundation, and began brokenly—

"I was startled, and then—and then—I remembered that Aunt Penelope says you always make—love to—every girl you meet."

For one brief instant he fought with an impulse that bade him be true to the promptings of his better nature. Then, yielding to self-interest, he pressed her to the purpose. With a touch of authority so delightful to some women, he made her resume her seat, saying, with more earnestness than she had ever before detected in his tone:

"You *may* believe I'd very humbly ask your pardon for what I did if the action had contained the slightest element of disrespect. As for Aunt Penelope's accusation, surely you have learned, by this time, that she is rather given to exaggerating things, though I will



confess that I've done much that was unwise and foolish in the past. I know this will not condemn me in my cousin's eyes, so long as honor and respect characterize my affection for her."

As he ceased speaking, she extended her hand impulsively. Her manner was touchingly childlike. In the expression of her face, now raised confidently to his own, he read the assurance that he had nothing to fear from Miss Penelope.

After a pause she asked, with a return of her old shyness:

"Will you forgive me, Cousin Laurie, for—for thinking, even for a moment, that you were so unprincipled as to—as to——"

"Fall in love?" he returned, keeping his eyes on her face. "Suppose I admit that I have. Shall I tell you about her? Shall I describe her to you?" Receiving a low-spoken "Yes" for answer, he resumed, "Verbal descriptions of people are unsatisfactory. Would you like to see her picture? Just a rough sketch, but you must promise to admire it." He drew the portfolio towards them once more, and in that moment she remembered, with relief, his destruction of the sketch of the dark-eyed girl. Her heart beat violently as she reached out her hand for the drawing that he had selected. One hasty glance and a little cry escaped her. Her wild hope was realized. She was looking at her own likeness.

"Do you think," he interposed, softly, "my little sweetheart cares anything for me?"

He had not meant to settle matters between them so soon, but the occasion seemed peculiarly opportune.

Before he drove her home, he had won her promise to keep their engagement secret for a little time and

thereby avoid any objection of Aunt Penelope's on the score of their imperfect acquaintance. To her, the knowledge that he had asked her to marry him was sufficient, and she fell in with his proposition with the pretty little touch of respect for the wisdom of his opinion that he had expected she would show.

That night he took supper at his aunt's. Milly's manner towards him in the presence of others was all that he could desire it to be, and as he walked slowly homeward, after a few minutes' whispered conversation with the girl who was to be his wife, he reviewed the events of the day with great complacency.

He had never deliberately planned what he would do the year following, and the novelty of the unusual mental performance made it doubly pleasing. He began to draw pictures of the different places he and Milly would visit abroad, the imposing winter quarters they would have in the city, the people they would entertain, and the impression he would make upon the aristocracy in general.

He began to wish himself more honestly in love, since she was to supply the material for these castles in the air. What an unaffected child she was! The remembrance of her simple words, "I do love you very dearly, Cousin Laurie," brought a smile to his lips. Had she betrayed the slightest symptom of indifference for his society instead of allowing him to so clearly read all that it had become to her, it is possible that his wooing would have contained more of the zest that is born of an uncertain conquest.

Human nature is prone to value things in proportion to the effort it requires to obtain possession. Some faint perception of this passed through his mind as he gained the edge of the woods that separated the Felton

cottage from Randlemeade. Striking a match and glancing at his watch, he found that the hands pointed to nine o'clock. Not a sound broke the dead stillness. He waited for ten minutes, thrusting his hands in the pockets of his light overcoat, for the night air was sharp—but no one came.

"What if she shouldn't come," he muttered, "after my disappointing Milly by leaving her an hour before I need to have done."

Striking another match to consult his watch once more, the flash of light disclosed the figure of a girl walking toward him.

"Kathie, you're late, and this air is rather unpleasant. What detained you?"

"I thought I wouldn't come," she returned briefly. And then, as they started to walk down the lane together, she broke out with sudden violence: "I changed my mind, however. I was afraid I wouldn't have as good a chance again and I wanted to tell you, Laurie Cameron, that I hate you."

Her voice trembled with passion, though she tried hard to speak calmly.

"Why, Kathie!" He attempted to find her hand.

"Don't, don't!" she cried, panting. "Oh! I know you never really loved me. Why did I believe you? How could I have been such a fool! I'm not your equal socially, perhaps; but was that any reason why you should have amused yourself with me? I came here last night and the night before. I could not rest till I had told you all—all I've been thinking these past weeks that I haven't seen you. Oh, Laurie, what was the matter? Didn't you want to come? Those beautiful moonlight nights I stayed out here for you—in vain. I hated you for what you made me suffer. This

morning, when I got your little note, so formal and stiff, as though meeting me was something you were forced to do against your will, I—I——”

“Kathie, here’s the old seat. Sit here a moment, and let me reason with you. You don’t know how wildly you are talking. Let me whisper something to you. You don’t hate me. Far from it. I can’t imagine what’s come over you. Don’t cry—it will spoil your beautiful eyes. Besides, I want to have a long, serious talk with you to-night, if you will listen. I know you are unhappy. And, God knows, I regret that I’m in any way the cause.” He was silent for a moment, and she did not speak.

His voice, so full of the old tenderness, made her heart beat fast, and a lump lay in her throat. Her passion was fast subsiding. “Do you remember,” he continued, “a day in the woods last June, almost a year ago? Do you remember what you told me?”

She hastily withdrew the hand he held. “You told me,” he went on, once more imprisoning it, “that you loved me. I am not going to repeat what you said, or what I said; but I want to ask you if you understand something of the nature of love? Have you never read that when highest and noblest it delights in self-sacrifice for the beloved?”

How her dark, tear-filled eyes tried to pierce the blackness and see his face.

“You believe that?”

A faint, low “Yes” was the only answer.

“Well, then,” he resumed, “let me explain our positions—acknowledging my love for you—believing in yours for me—I am willing to meet you here some night, drive into Norwood, take the train for New York, marry you and together disappear from all who ever heard

our names. I have enough money to pay our fares and hotel bills for a few weeks and then—well, we might drift along and by hook or crook keep out of the poor-house. Of course you can understand that my father would cut me off without a cent, in which case Rob would get it all. I might manage to sell most of the things I picked up on the other side, and raise——”

“Oh, Laurie, don’t! You know I’d never agree to such a thing,” she interrupted, wondering if she had heard aright.

His unusual manner, his remarkable words, so different from his customary half-teasing, half-serious treatment of the trivial subjects in which they had a mutual interest, amazed her. All the tenderness in her woman’s nature came to the surface. Pride, jealousy, and the torturing doubts of his affection for herself, were swept away, and she fell on her knees beside him on the damp grass.

“Do you suppose, for an instant, I’d have you do all that for me? Oh, Laurie, I’m not as selfish as that!”

Tenderly helping her to rise, he said, gently, sadly, “I see no other alternative. I’ve thought it all over. I’ve cursed myself for mentioning love to you under the circumstances. Somehow it couldn’t be helped. It became almost second nature to wander past here in the evening. Last winter, when I went to the city, I tried to believe I’d be pleased if some one more deserving took my place, some one with the power of making you happy. But when I came back and found out that you were the same, I knew that a crisis was at hand. To-night you must settle the question, Kathie. As for what I just proposed, I’ll admit I did anticipate a refusal on your part, but I’m willing to make the sacrifice.”

"You shall make no such sacrifice for me," she put in hastily. "I could work for you and be happy; but I couldn't live and know that I'd been the means of depriving you of what you love, the things that make life pleasant to you. I'd rather die. Oh, Laurie! if you had only talked this way before! I had a vague idea that because I'd been to school and could be a lady if I was well-dressed, that, if you wanted to, you could marry me and take me off to Europe to live, where nobody would know that my father was your father's servant. I have often read of such things. I forgot, you see, that we'd need money. I forgot, though you've told me so many times, that artists never make a living without a rich father or uncle, or somebody to help them. I forgot everything, except that I'd crawl on my hands and knees to the ends of the earth, if you bade me come."

"My poor darling," he said, softly. "Oh, Kathie! fate is against us. I feared, all along, we should wake up from our sweet dream in this prosaic fashion, but it's some consolation to feel that you understand just how I'm situated."

"Oh, yes," she said, slowly, "I'm wide awake now. I expect nothing from you. I don't know what I've been thinking of all these months. If you believe me, Laurie, you'll come out here once in a while in the evening. It's all I ask. Not as—as a lover—as a friend. I shall want to hear what you are doing. If folks see us and talk, let them. Such gossip won't hurt you—it never hurts a man—and for myself I don't care. You will come, won't you?" she added coaxingly. "People may say what they please about its being so hard for those who have been lovers to be simply friends, but we can be. The only difference will be, that you'll

not hold my hand, nor—nor kiss me, nor even speak of love, or anything like it.”

“Of course I will see you,” he returned, guardedly, “though not as often as heretofore. I’m going to be very busy this summer, but no doubt there will be many a night when I can come over and have a chat with you, if you’ll promise not to fly at me, as you did just now, when the whole business was making me so unhappy.”

“Was it? Oh, Laurie, I’m so sorry. Shall I tell you why I was so angry when I first met you?” she continued, laying her hand gently on his arm. “I overheard you one evening talking to your brother here in the lane. Do you remember?”

“To Rob?” he inquired, wondering what he had said.

“Yes, but I understand better now. It was about the only answer you could have made him, I suppose, though it hurt me greatly then. I thought you didn’t care.”

“However,” he interposed, “you are convinced now that I do?”

“Yes,” she said, and was silent. She could not help thinking that he had agreed to her refusal of his proposition with ill-concealed relief, though the full bitterness of the fact did not appeal to her till the influence of his presence was removed.

“It is very late,” she said at length.

He went with her as far as the gate of the cottage, and then paused, as if reluctant to leave her. Once more he offered her the old caress, unrebuked. His arms were around her, and she forgot they had agreed to be but simple friends.

He turned and walked homeward very slowly. Once

alone, he congratulated himself upon the adroitness with which he had escaped the entanglement, wondering, at the same time, how he had ever come to allow such a web to be woven around him.

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## CHAPTER X.

THE bright spring days dragged wearily with Neal. He had not spent a single evening in Bolton Place since the night he had talked to Janet so plainly about his cousin Robert, but he had met her late one afternoon as she was returning from the store, and had turned and walked a short distance with her.

Though she had not at first mentioned Robert, he read the meaning of her changed expression, of the new and happy light in her eyes. No questioning was necessary to tell him the truth, but the rapidity with which his uncomfortable convictions had been realized almost bewildered him.

They walked for some moments in silence, but as he was about to leave her, he said wistfully,

"What has happened to our friendship, Janet? Can't you tell me what every one else has heard? Don't you believe I'm eager to wish you the happiness that every other friend is privileged to do?"

His tone had filled her with instant regret for the strange feeling of reserve that was causing her to avoid the subject of her engagement.

"Yes, Neal. I believe there's no one that knows me as honestly concerned about my future as you are. And because of this kind interest, as I told you the



last time you came to the house, I'm anxious to tell you more of my hopes and happiness than other people know. My future in some way seems so clearly mapped out, my work so defined. I have always had a peculiar love of being independent. I have always had the interest and welfare of others to look after and, Neal, it seems to me that God has recently given me a fresh opportunity to help some one. You know, of course, that I have promised to marry Robert, and you also know I wouldn't have made the promise unless I—loved him; but—but in spite of this, I realize his faults. My love does not blind me. I know he is easily influenced for good or evil, and I feel, as he wants me to be his wife, the purpose of my life shall be to save him from—himself. I do not overrate my own power, but he needs some one to help him; and surely no earthly power but that of a woman who sincerely loved him, and who was his wife, could do this thoroughly. Oh! Neal, you don't know how inexpressibly sweet it is to feel that you may be of service to one that you care for. It gives you such a purpose in life. It fills up the emptiness; it takes you out of yourself. Do you understand me better now?"

Neal felt that he had never loved Janet more fervently, more reverently, than he did at this moment. He had an indistinct recollection of the answer he had given her. He was conscious that it had not been exactly to the point, for he remembered the rather surprised look upon her face as she had bidden him good-bye, and left him to fight out the battle where no eye could see him. Her true and valued friend! That was the place assigned him. With his head bowed upon his desk, the resolution took root within him to ever be deserving of the relationship. She was

happy now, but should the day of disappointment and trial draw near her, he would, if God so willed it, be her helper in these dark hours. He felt instinctively that if in trouble, she would turn to him, as in the past, for advice and the hope that he might yet be of service to her cheered his unselfish heart and lessened the keen pain that the death of other hopes had caused him. His strong love for Janet had been in itself an education. Its influence had purified his life, directing his attention to the emulation of all that is best in nature, screening, shutting out from his thoughts the deadly pessimistic tendencies of the age, and maintaining within him undisturbed the old faith in the religion of his forefathers.

It gave him a certain thrill of satisfaction to remember that she was not going away, though she would be Robert's wife. Even if another held a prior and more sacred right to protect her, he felt that he could not abandon his habits of watchfulness, but, for her dear sake, it must in the future extend as well to the man she loved.

One evening, shortly after his talk with Janet on the street, he started for the cottage. As he stood on the front porch awaiting the answer to his ring, he thought of the hours he had spent in the familiar room, of the books they had read aloud in the long winter evenings, and the sweet, low music that had so added to his enjoyment of the summer twilight.

The sound of quick footsteps in the hall cut short his recollections and in another instant the door had swung open, and a rosy, laughing, girlish face, confronted him.

"Neal, really Neal! My dear boy, how startled you look! Didn't you know I was home? Forgotten it?

Then I won't shake hands ; I won't even tell you I'm glad to see you, I won't——"

"Oh, yes, you will. Why, Edna, how you've grown !"

"You're the fifteenth person who has made that remark and I've only been home two days. Neta and," she added in a low, mischievous tone, "brother Robert are in the parlor. We somehow guessed it must be you."

As he followed her into the sitting-room, Janet rose, and came smilingly forward.

Robert shook hands with unusual warmth, and brought, with much alacrity, the big rocker from the other side of the room and insisted on his cousin occupying it.

"Edna's going to play for us in a moment, Neal. Like all young ladies, she scorns the idea of acceding to a first invitation of this kind, but presently I'm going to ask her again, and then you——"

But the young lady had already taken her seat at the piano. Neal watched her while she played. He had not seen her since the holidays, and he inwardly confessed that even a few months had added another shade of loveliness to the rare, piquant beauty of her face. In figure she was much shorter than Janet, but she was exquisitely proportioned. Certain gestures, little mannerisms, suggested the elder sister, but there the resemblance ceased, for Edna was of the perfect blonde type. Her big blue eyes, with their long curling lashes, her shining hair, her cunning little nose, her dimpled chin, red lips, and exquisite complexion, had been the envy of her schoolmates. But all these faultless attributes combined did not lend to her face its chief attraction. Though her eyes were as blue as

the summer sky, you forgot their beauty of color when they were bent upon you—with such rapidity did their expression change. Dancing with merriment and mischief, serious with thought, tender with feeling, pleading, bewitching, mocking, peace-destroying—all with bewildering distinctness. In disposition, too, she was decidedly variable and had a way of saying anything that entered her brain. At school she had been a universal favorite, though for books, save poetry and novels, she had a rooted abhorrence. Life, movement, variety, admiration, and power, were what her insatiable little soul demanded, and cost what it might, she was very determined to carry out her ambition.

Her piece concluded, she wheeled around on the stool, and with a comical expression of timidity, appeared to await her listeners' praise.

"Robert, where is your gallantry?" she said with sudden gayety. "Here, I'll play a waltz. Open the door, Neal, and dance in the hall with papa—with a chair—with something. Poor Neta does not waltz. There's work for you, Robert, presently." Gleefully her fingers flew over the keys. "That would wake me up if I were dead," she exclaimed, as though the music had bewitched her.

Janet then took her place and played a waltz. Immediately Edna claimed Robert and led him into the hall. With her, dancing amounted to a passion. Her feet scarcely seemed to touch the floor.

Neal watched them from the seat he had taken near the piano. Janet was aware of the latter's presence. Still playing, she said in a low tone :

"I'm glad you came over to-night, Neal. I began to fear you were not coming any more. Father, too,

has missed you. Something seemed gone from the house."

"Thank you," he said, simply.

"Dance a little with Edna, will you? Robert does not care much for dancing. She's just like a bird that's been caged."

Neal was not light on his feet nor as graceful as Robert. While he was circling around the hall, he soon became conscious of his cousin's proximity to the white-robed figure at the piano and scarcely heard Edna's interjected questions.

Where was his stern resolution to bury his old feelings? He scorned his weakness, but for the time, seemed powerless to control it.

Taking a chair by his side, he attempted to enter into conversation with John Morvick, but his attention was elsewhere.

"Have you nothing to tell us of your new cousin, Neal?" Edna suddenly exclaimed. "Of course you are going to take me over to see her?"

"Of course. Whenever you like."

"How sweetly acquiescent you are to-night," she added, in a tone so low that the others did not catch the words. "What has come over you? Are you in love? Tell me about her, Neal. Neta thinks a good deal of that book; see how you're crumpling the leaves." He put it hastily on the table. "I wish you could see your face," she whispered, leaning over the back of his chair. "There! I mustn't tease you any more. Brother Robert is trying to induce Neta to sing. He can make her do anything. She is like wax in his hands."

About half-past nine Neal rose to go. Somewhat to his surprise, Robert declared his intention of accom-

panying him. Presently they found themselves strolling down the deserted street. Reticence was a quality unknown to Robert Cameron and when they turned the corner of Bolton Place, he began to speak of the home he meant to provide for Janet, and the eagerness he felt to take her away from her present irksome duties.

Neal's face changed color. The darkness hid this manifestation of emotion. He tried to speak calmly, hating himself the while for the strong desire that actuated him to get away from the sound of his cousin's voice.

"You've been a good friend to her all these years, old fellow. It will always puzzle me all my life, why she didn't—why she couldn't—well, you know what I mean. But, hang it, Neal, I will be worthy of her. If ever a man had an incentive to make something of his life I have. It is true, I don't suppose I'll ever be heard of, outside of our own town, but if I can make her happy, if I can keep her respect and never for a single moment have her regret that she married me, I'll consider my years well spent. I will believe what she believes and think what she thinks. She is as far above me as the stars are above the earth, but there is nothing to prevent my following, although I never catch up. God only knows what I was thinking of to leave her so long. I suppose she's told you of our disagreement? Though I was little more than a boy when I left home, I realized, even then, something of her nobility of character. Those years are all behind me. The future will have a different record to show."

At the corner of his own street Neal paused.

"Rob," he began, huskily, "as you remarked a moment ago, for years I've been her friend. I never could

have been anything else. She never for one instant led me to expect I might, but I clung to a spark of hope; I couldn't help it. Her life has been so lonely, she has had so little sympathy, I think that made her grateful for my friendship. I never was a favorite with women. You may believe me sincere when I tell you I am glad this happiness has come to her. I hope it may last. It all depends on you, Rob. You're everything in the world to her. Always remember that. Always remember and feel this great responsibility. No one can take your place. No one can do for her what you can do. Your love is her life. As for myself, I reckon I'll live and die in the same old rut. It would do me good to know that, in the years to come, I can inflict my old bachelor hobbies upon you whenever I wish. It will do you no harm. There was never anything between us."

"I know," said his companion, wishing he could better express his sympathy. "By Jove, Neal, in your shoes I should go mad with envy and jealousy. Observe the contrast! You know, old fellow, I'd give a good deal to share and divide with you, as we used to years ago. But one can't cut one's happiness in two, like an apple. You can believe, though, that our home will always be open to you."

This characteristic speech reminded Neal of the hot-headed, generous boy of the past. As they separated, some touch of Janet's faith in her old lover possessed him for the moment. Beneath his cousin's egotism and supreme self-confidence lay such a fund of right impulses, generosity, frankness, and sincerity of purpose, who could tell but that, under proper influence, these germs of good might not grow to large proportions?

## CHAPTER XI.

EDNA had gone with her Aunt Lydia to New York for a brief visit, and during her absence Janet managed to run over, at least once a day, to look after Anthony.

The old man delighted in hearing her repeat every particular of Robert's plans about the house he intended to buy. He felt her happiness as though it were his own. He revelled in the knowledge that his past predictions for her future were coming true. He marvelled at his own prophetic powers, and began to believe that Lydia underrated his ability to forecast events.

Robert had asked Neal to give his opinion of the contemplated purchase, and on the day of the intended visit Janet failed to go over to the homestead; but, late in the afternoon she started for a few minutes' talk with her uncle before nightfall.

At the corner of Bolton Place, she was startled to find herself face to face with Neal.

"Why—where," she began, "where is Robert? I thought you were going with him, Neal."

"Rob went to Norwood at two o'clock. He was to have called for me at five. I waited till half-past, then I went to the house. They told me he had gone to Norwood with Tom and Lew Paine early in the afternoon."

"It's very strange," she returned. "Who are these gentlemen?"

"Newcomers in the town," he answered, shortly.

He then plunged into conversation, fearing that she



had noted his tone. "Laurie went away quite unexpectedly this morning. A friend he met in Europe has just arrived, and invited Laurie to make a trip to the great lakes and Canada with him. I suppose he'll be gone two months, and there is a very sad little woman at home in consequence."

"Yes?" she said absently.

"But it's all settled between them."

"I'm sure I hope they will be happy. I'm sorry," she went on abruptly, "that Robert disappointed you. Some business affair has taken him away of course. He didn't know anything about it last night. Come over for a while this evening, and he shall make you an humble apology."

"Oh, I'm used to Rob," said Neal. "He is so forgetful. We can go to-morrow or next day as well as——"

"Why," she interrupted, "his refusal of the property expires to-day. Is it possible he's forgotten that? If others are looking at it——"

"I just called in at the office and saw young Mason," put in her companion, his face reddening under her steady gaze. "That will be all right."

"How thoughtful—how thoughtful you are!" she cried, impulsively. "I don't know what we should do without you, Neal."

As he was about to leave her at the gate, she said:

"Come, we cannot let you grow into a hermit. You must run over to-night." And he gave the desired promise. He knew full well that she had no conception of his feelings towards her. Perhaps she thought he had outlived his love. Later in the evening, Janet lighted the sitting-room lamp and sat with some embroidery lying untouched on her lap, waiting

for Robert. John Morvick dozed in his chair. Work seemed impossible. Folding the pretty bit of damask, she started noiselessly to put it away. The sewing-room was quite dark, but a sudden breath of the cool night air showed her that the front window had been left open. Groping her way to close it, she was attracted by the sound of a low voice in the street. Peering through the partially opened blinds, she could distinguish the figures of two men. No thought that she would be eavesdropping crossed her mind as, with a dark suspicion tugging at her heart, she fell on her knees by the window to catch what they were saying. She recognized Neal Fleming's voice, persuasive and pleading.

"Don't go in to-night, Rob. Come home, old fellow. You disappointed me this afternoon. Let's go home, and have a game of cards. Besides, it's late, and they have gone to bed, I'm sure."

The answer she could not understand, though her own name, spoken in a thick, unnatural tone, made her shudder. The handle of the gate clicked. One of them had touched it. For an instant she thought that they were coming in. But no, they moved off, arm-in-arm, to judge from their proximity, and once more all was silence. For some minutes Neal's words echoed and re-echoed about her without meaning. Why hadn't he wanted Robert to go in? Why had Robert's voice sounded so strangely? Why—oh, God! The truth forced itself upon her, and her head fell heavily forward on her arms.

"The first offence," whispered Love; "some one has tempted him. Those men that Neal spoke of this afternoon."

Mechanically she closed the window and crept back

to the light, to find that her father had gone upstairs. She sought her own room, and sat vacantly staring out of the window into the darkness.

She clasped her hands together. They were as cold as ice. Her ring pressed into the flesh, but she did not heed it. Turning her eyes at length from the window she caught sight of a small pocket Testament lying on the dressing-stand. Reaching forward, she opened it, and began to read until she came to these words—"Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, 'I say not unto thee until seven times, but until seventy times seven.'"

Refreshing tears began to flow.

"If the night were only ended," she sighed, "and he could come to me and tell me all."

A woman will bear the sharpest grief with far less murmuring than she brooks suspense.

"Oh! my darling, my darling!" she cried aloud, "as God forgives me, so let me have patience and charity toward thee. I do not understand the world nor the temptations of those living in it." Later, as she lay on her bed, her eyes strained and open, she pondered, "How can I judge? I will get Neal to tell me more about those men. I wonder what they are to Robert?"

Womanlike, she was already shifting the blame for her lover's wrong-doing upon some cause outside of himself.

The long weary hours dragged slowly by, and dawn at last appeared. She wondered how soon he would come. She wondered if she would act as though she had no knowledge of the reason why he had not been to see her.

She answered the girls at random that morning ; she gave incoherent directions, and started at the slightest sound. Noon was approaching, and still she had heard nothing. About half-past one, when the afternoon's work was well under way, she rose to answer a peremptory call from her father. Opening the door of the sitting-room she was surprised to find him confronted by a little black-haired, black-eyed girl. In her chubby hands she clutched a soiled and crumpled scrap of paper, and her dark eyes were fixed inquiringly on the sightless face of her companion.

"Why, Teenie Felton, where did you spring from?"

"Home," answered the child promptly. "I climbed in at the window."

"So she did," said John Morvick, crossly, "and startled me very much. Janet, I believe she has something for you—a note from Robert."

"Have you, Teenie?"

"Yes. Mr. Robert gave this to Ezra to bring to you, but I took it. I knowed the way," she explained, relinquishing the note, and rubbing her grimy little fingers over the felt table-cover. But Janet had already opened the letter, and was hastily reading the few lines it contained.

"DEAREST,—Neal and I are going to look at our house' this forenoon, but I will call for you at three to go for a drive. Don't say you can't come. We will have a nice long afternoon.

"Devotedly,

R. C."

Slipping it in her pocket, she turned to the child.

"Teenie, how is your sister? Don't you call her 'Kathie'?"

"When she's nice. When she's cross and slaps me I call her Kate. Ma calls her Kate. She goes to

Norwood now every day. Kathie's got lots of money. She works."

"Works in Norwood? How long has she been doing that?"

"Oh, ever and ever so long. Ezra goes to meet her every night. She's going to give me five cents if I promise to come into the house nights, when the sun sets, and not kick ma when she's drunk."

"Drunk! Oh, Teenie!"

"Yes, drunk."

"Why, Teenie! I was told you were such a good girl."

"I ain't. Jimmie Blair told me the other day all the Feltons is a bad lot. What's a bad lot?"

"Janet," remonstrated the blind man in an undertone, "give her a penny, and send her home. What an extraordinary child it is!"

Janet found her purse, and emptied some loose coin into the child's pocket.

"Come, Teenie, I will open the front door for you. You may tell Mr. Robert when you see him you delivered the message safely."

"I'm coming again."

"Yes, do."

"Can't he see a bit?" she whispered in the hall.

"No."

"Why?"

"You wouldn't understand, Teenie, I am afraid. Be thankful for your own bright eyes. Good-bye," said Janet kindly, as her little visitor jumped nimbly down the steps, jingling her pennies.

Janet, greatly relieved, went back to her work for an hour, and then began to prepare for her drive.

When Robert drove up, her eyes lingered search-

ingly on his face for a moment after their greeting, but he returned her gaze unflinching, and her spirits rose.

"Let's drive through Helstone and back on the plank road: we shall pass the house. Tell me, Neta, are you glad it's all settled? The papers were signed this morning. Our house is now an actual fact."

"How did Neal like the house?"

"Immensely."

But Cameron was evidently not thinking of Neal or of his opinion of their future home. Averting his face, he fell to watching the revolving wheels.

Turning at length, he asked: "What did you think because I didn't come over last night?"

"What did I think?" she repeated, as we often do with questions it is difficult to answer.

"Yes, honestly, where did you think I was?"

"Home," she said, almost inaudibly.

"Well, so I was in the evening, but in the afternoon I went into Norwood with the Paines. I couldn't get out of going somehow. I knew Neal wouldn't mind."

"But why did you not tell him?"

"I hadn't time. You know I told you the other night of Paine's offer to give me Helmky's vacant situation in the bank? The more I think of the idea, the better I like it. Of course the salary is small, but I don't want to live in idleness. It will bring me in contact with the prominent men, and lead to something better in the end. I tell you, Neta, a man has got to constantly remind others of his existence, or he'll be out of the swim in no time."

"But these acquaintances you were with yesterday, Robert, are they in the bank?"

"The Paines, you mean? Lew is, but Tom is a lawyer in Norwood. He's just begun practice. They are both good, whole-souled fellows."

"Where did you first meet them?" she inquired.

"Oh, Lew was a travelling salesman for a New York house. I met him West. But," he broke in abruptly, "aren't you going to ask what kept me away from you last night? It's awful hard to make a first confession. But it's got to be done. You don't know how like a hound I felt this morning when—when I remembered. Neal's a brick. He saved me last night from making a bigger fool of myself than I had already. A model young man himself, strange to say, he never preaches. And this morning the only allusion he made to—to last night was, 'Don't deceive her, old fellow,'—and I never will."

He was speaking rapidly. His face was flushed, his hands nervously fingered the reins. She touched him gently on the arm.

"I'm so glad to hear you say that."

"Are you?" he cried, brightening. "You won't throw me over for this failure, will you? No, no, I am sure you won't. I'll tell you how it happened. The boys had business at Armstrong's. The horses were warm. Lew sent them around to the stables, and—well, the upshot of it was, I went in too. But, on my word, Neta, I had no more thought of drinking when I got out of that wagon than you have. The boys ordered champagne and I drank one glass. I couldn't get out of it, you see. It is an unpleasant position to be placed in."

"And then?"

"We had another. Heaven only knows where I get my egg-shell head. I've seen the Captain drink

three times as much as I did yesterday at a sitting, and walk off as straight as a string, while I——”

“Don’t!” Janet pleaded. “I understand. But oh! don’t go so far again. You have made so many promises of your own framing, make one now for me. Promise to avoid those men who are likely to tempt you. Oh, I know, I know,” she persisted, as he was about to speak, “it is hard to resist when in company with those that do such things and think nothing of it. The best way is to shun them.”

Her eyes were full of tears. As though suspicious of the fact, he raised her veil.

“Crying? Oh, Neta! listen. This thing shall never occur again. I promise, I swear it, and you may believe me. Kiss me, and then I’ll know I’m forgiven.”

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## CHAPTER XII.

THE heat expected in midsummer had arrived, together with a drought of unusual persistency. Brown dust covered the fields that baked beneath a blazing sun. Something of the enervation of the tropics, for the time being, had descended on all living things—from thirsty shrubs and plants to man himself. Captain Cameron, sitting in his library, was vainly wondering what the result on human life would be if the mercury rose even one degree higher—when the door opened, and Miss Randle appeared, evidently much perturbed.

“Oliver,” she cried, weakly, “I’ve been so frightened.”

“A mouse?” he asked, without looking up from his paper.



"No, not a mouse, a man. I thought I'd go into the studio a little while ago and close the window. I've opened it every morning since Laurie's been away, because the place smells so bad of paint or something. But just now, when I opened the door, I saw some one climbing out of the window. I thought it was a thief and nearly fainted. But it proved to be John Felton's half-witted son. Two drawers in the table were open, and things scattered about. Oh, Oliver, I wish you had been there to catch him!"

"Did he steal anything?"

"No, I don't think he did, but he startled me so. I was afraid I should have one of my old spells." She sank into a chair and applied her little bottle of smelling salts. "Don't you think his father ought to be told of this and punish him?"

"The boy is scarcely responsible."

"But I believe, Oliver, I really believe it isn't right to let him go on this way."

"What way?"

"Why, breaking into people's houses and alarming people."

"Be more exact, Elinore. He's quite harmless."

"What do you suppose took him into your son's rooms?" she persisted.

"It's hard to say. Curiosity, perhaps. If he was a woman I'd have no doubt of his having gone there to appease the feminine fancy for snooping into what didn't belong to him."

"Oliver!"

"Yes?"

"Your words have a double meaning. Can you—do you mean me?"

"There you go," he cried, impatiently. "In all the

years that I've lived in the same house with you, if by any chance I happen to criticise your sex, no matter how innocent you may be of the fault in question, you invariably chirp in with 'Do you mean me?' Do you represent the whole female population of the globe?"

"No, Oliver, no; but you have such—such an unpleasant way of making people believe you're referring to them. I know, of course—oh, yes, I'm quite sure," she went on cheerfully, "that you didn't mean me. But tell me, Oliver, you didn't. I'm just like a child. I always want to be assured in words. Tell me you didn't?"

"Didn't what? Elinore, if you don't stop this infernal nonsense, I'll—I'll have a whole regiment of doctors come and inquire into your sanity."

So saying, he tossed aside his paper and left her in possession of the room.

Such skirmishes were of frequent occurrence between the Captain and his sister-in-law. A horror of scenes, of feminine tears and tender supplications, was the cause of many retreats on the Captain's part. But, though victorious in one sense, Miss Randle never liked the style in which the victory was conferred. Still, therefore, highly aggrieved by her brother-in-law's last words, she looked up, to see that somebody had intruded upon her reflections.

A pretty figure, wearing a delicate muslin dress, with a straw hat shading her face, advanced into the room, and then drew back in some confusion.

"Uncle Oliver said I should find you here. Are you ill, Miss Randle?"

"Oh, no, simply the heat and—and a little unpleasantness with your uncle. Sit down, my dear,

How courageous of you to venture out this very warm morning."

With much embarrassment, Milly took a seat, and after trying not to notice her companion as the latter dried her eyes, hastened to explain the reason of her early call.

"Neal was going to the village and I walked with him as far as the post-office. I got a letter from Laurie and he wanted me to tell you he is coming home to-morrow. He decided suddenly on Wednesday."

"Yes? Ah! your uncle will be pleased. We had not hoped to see him before the month was out. Both boys are sad Bohemians in their tastes, as I've always told their father."

Milly colored.

"Does Laurie go away every summer on such long trips, Miss Randle?"

"Yes, and you'll probably have to lead just such a life. Hurrying to this place, packing up again, coming home, going off."

"Oh, I love to travel!" cried Milly.

"Do you? Well, you are likely to have your desire." Then she began to give Milly a detailed account of her recent fright in the studio. "Your Uncle Oliver is, at heart, really concerned. I understand him so well. Whenever I speak of having been frightened, it makes him positively angry. It's his way of hiding his anxiety. He was actually inclined to scold me before you came in, just as if I could prevent that repulsive boy's extraordinary deeds."

Having delivered her message, Milly did not linger. She craved the seclusion of her own room, to re-read her letter, the presence of which in her pocket was suffi-

cient to make her oblivious to the heat, as she picked her way along the dusty road.

These weeks of Laurie's absence had been very lonely ones to her. Every evening, at bedtime, she drew a pencil through the date on her calendar, and now she remembered exultingly that only one more remained.

Before he went away, Laurie had told Miss Penelope of Milly's promise, and the engagement had been duly announced. At that important interview Milly had not been present, and therefore did not see the tears her aunt had shed on the occasion.

"It's no use, Neal," she declared. "I feel it in my bones that he'll break her heart some day. He's not the man for her. Honestly, I believe if she had no money, he wouldn't have looked at her."

Just before she reached home Milly's reverie was broken by some one calling to her from across the street. She paused, and then hastily joined her friend.

"Edna Morvick! I didn't see you."

"Nor hear me either, for at the moment you were fifty thousand miles away, if one can go so far on this small globe."

The speaker was two or three inches taller than Milly, though they were much of the same build. For some weeks they had been the best of friends. Violent intimacies were not rare with Edna, but they were apt to be short-lived. She was surprised at her fondness for Milly. Milly was very different from any girl that she had ever fancied. Milly's innocence made her feel very wise and old and lent a certain patronizing air to her manner. On the other hand, Milly was also strongly attached. She did not understand her new friend, but she loved to hear her merry voice, whatever nonsense

it might utter. Her admiration was sincere and very exalted.

"Neta's very busy this week," explained Edna as they walked along together. "People in love are very silly. I told Brother Robert last night I wished I could disappear till after the honeymoon, and Neta had come back to earth. But I forget you are also engaged."

"Laurie's coming home to-morrow," said Milly, growing very red as she pronounced the name.

"Then I won't come over to-morrow night as you suggested."

"Please, Edna, that will make no difference. I shall see him all the afternoon. He gets in on the noon train. Besides," she added shyly, "there are many other evenings to look forward to."

"Well, then, perhaps I will. He'll want to monopolize you. Men never have faith in female friendship. But, 'forewarned, forearmed.' You may tell your future lord and master I'm going to assert my rights."

"I am sure," began Milly earnestly, "Laurie is pleased that we are acquainted. Why are you so convinced that he will not want us to be just as we were before he came?"

"Oh, he won't mind, if our claims don't conflict."

As soon as Edna was gone, Milly's conscience began to upbraid her, as she remembered how she had urged her friend to keep her promise. She was conscious of a great longing to have these first hours all alone with him. A wild impulse seized her to rush back and ask Edna to defer her visit. But pride restrained her, and, hastening her steps, she was soon at home.

For some reason that she did not explain, Edna

spent an unusually long time over her dress the following evening. Rummaging among Janet's boxes, she found some old lace of her mother's and devoted much care to its arrangement.

"The lace is an improvement," she reflected. "Do I need any more color? That heavy silk cord, if I can find it." Exploring the chaos of a bureau drawer, she discovered the cord, and knotted it as a girdle. Then, stealing out into the garden, she possessed herself of a single full-blown yellow rose and fastened it at her throat.

"Neal will bring me home, Neta. Poor boy, what a convenience I make of him. Don't sit up for me if you feel tired. Robert can put the key under the mat."

Then she kissed her father, and allowed him to inspect her costume with his nervous fingers.

The sun had already set as Miss Penelope's gate shut behind her and she saw Milly standing on the veranda.

"We expected you to supper, Edna. Didn't you understand?"

"Oh, yes, I understood, but I've been busy all the afternoon. Where's the rest of the family?"

"The mosquitoes drove them in. It's cool in the sitting-room."

Following her friend, Edna glanced hastily about the room. Neal was lounging on the sofa. Miss Penelope sat by the open window, with her knitting in her lap, listening to the concert of katydids outside in the shrubbery. Neal gathered himself up as the girls came in.

"We've been looking for you," he said, as their visitor went over to his aunt.

"We?" repeated the girl, merrily. "Don't let me interrupt your nap, Neal. Even your voice is sleepy."

But she seated herself, nevertheless, in a chair near him.

On first meeting her after her return from school, Neal had not been prepared to cope with such an astonishing advancement and growth of ideas. Several spirited arguments, in which he had ruefully confessed himself worsted, had opened his eyes to the fact that she had grown vastly in worldly knowledge, if not in stature, during the past year. Her conversation, her very audacity, amused him. But he was beginning to meet her so skilfully, with her own weapons of raillery and jesting, that her vanity was piqued at this unmistakable indication of the absence of that background of serious admiration on which affection builds. She frequently owned to a feeling of annoyance that this big, uninteresting man should be so impervious to her sweetest smiles and her prettiest speeches.

Milly took small share in the conversation, for she was eagerly listening for Laurie. A telegram had reached her late that afternoon, telling her that business had detained him and he could not be with her till after eight. But she was determined to see him first, if only for a moment.

Neal suggested lights finally, but the girls demurred, Edna declaring that she loved to be in the gloaming.

"It is an hour of sweet reflection," said she, softly, "when we dream dreams, and decide what of all things in the world we'd like best."

"Then it's the most pernicious hour of the twenty-four," Neal interposed. "Day-dreams and air-castles clog energy."

"In spite of all that, you used to build them, I know. Didn't he, Miss Penelope? And some unkind hand has, no doubt, tumbled them down."

"Neal's like his father. He never was fanciful," put in Aunt Penelope, before her nephew could reply. "I often wonder how in the world he makes up his stories. He's so matter-of-fact."

"Listen," Neal interrupted, "~~that's~~ his step, Milly."

But his cousin had **heard** the same sound, and was already half-way **out of** the room. Edna became suddenly silent. Five, ten minutes passed and then the voices in the hall drew nearer, and Milly returned with a **dark figure close** behind her.

"What's this ? A séance, Aunt Penelope ? Hello, Neal, old fellow, I feel you're here, but I don't see you."

"This is Edna's doing. Can you find a chair ? Ah, by the way, I believe you've not met for years. Let me re-introduce you in the dark."

The new-comer caught the glimmer of an outstretched hand and knew that some one was standing near Neal. As Milly struck a match, and lighted the lamp on the piano, the laughing speech died upon his lips, and the sudden illumination found him staring with fast-growing pleasure at the girl whose hand he still held in his own.

"Would you have known me ?" she asked, later, as she sank back in her chair and smiled up at him. He had spoken to Miss Penelope, had answered all their questions about his trip, and, at last, found himself again at Edna's side.

"Known you ?" he repeated. "Yes, from your picture, but from no remembrance of the little romp I used to know."

"You look older," she suggested.

"Thank you."

"For your years. You understood me ;" and then



she turned her attention to the cat, until he made her speak again, that he might see her eyes, which her lowered lids concealed.

"Are you going to sing, Edna?" asked Neal.

"Yes," looking up, "if I can find a song that will be likely to suit you." She rose, and went to the piano. Allowing Neal to raise the stool a little, she turned the music that he had selected for her.

"Later, Neal. Let's have this later; find me one of Milly's songs." She ran her fingers lightly over the keys. "Do you know what Neta used to tell me when I was a little girl and went away from home? She always said, 'Don't talk too much.' I think people often long to thus admonish me now, when they insist upon seating me at the piano."

Neal alone caught what she said.

"If you believed that, you would not own it," he said, briefly.

She took the piece from him, a quaint little German song, and commenced the accompaniment. Her voice, a clear soprano, had received considerable training at school. It was not very powerful, but its vibratory sweetness, as she rendered the last notes of the sad song, was very touching.

When she finished, Laurie was beside her.

"I suppose I would only repeat what many have said before if I told you how your singing impressed me. You are not going to get up? You will sing something in English? By the way," he added in a lower tone, while she turned and dreamily struck some soft chords, "what am I to call you? 'Edna?' That alone seems natural."

"This is a momentous question that our years have brought us," she said, soberly, shaking her head. "If

you say 'Edna' I must say 'Laurie.' Positively I couldn't do that at present."

"Why couldn't you?"

"Well, because we're grown up and don't know each other, and such a degree of—shall I say familiarity?—would imply that we were friends, and I am by no means certain that I shall like you. If I remember rightly, you never were a nice boy."

"You told me a little while ago that I had changed. I shall now regard that ambiguous speech as complimentary."

She laughed, and shrugged her shoulders.

"I think the last time we met, we parted bitter enemies over the ownership of some marbles, but I've always believed part of those same marbles were mine, in spite of your denial."

"How can I make amends for my contradiction?"

"By finding the song you wish me to sing," she returned abruptly, wheeling around on the stool. "Are you clearing the table for cards, Milly? In a moment we'll be ready."

It was a wild Irish melody that Laurie placed before her—the words of a passionate tribute to love. Milly, standing near Neal, while he sorted and selected a set of cards from the table-drawer was watching her lover, but he sent her no answering glance.

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### CHAPTER XIII.

WHEN Laurie left Milly, and started to walk home through the soft stillness of the summer night, he found it impossible to divest himself of the feeling that the

last half-hour alone with his future wife had been the least enjoyable feature of the evening. She had conscientiously described every little trifling occurrence that had taken place during his absence, but he had felt no special interest in all this, and barely succeeded in his attempt to feign it, for she had gradually grown more silent. He had found it strangely difficult to keep up the conversation with any degree of his old success under similar circumstances. Milly's eyes, he told himself, had such a curious fashion of watching your face, as though that unflinching gaze helped her to understand you.

Her expression, as he had held her for a moment in his arms before leaving, haunted him. It had not been reproachful, only wistful and loving, as, with an evident effort to conquer the feeling of shyness that had hitherto restrained her, she had suddenly laid her head upon his shoulder and whispered how happy she was to have him back once more. This pathetic little assurance had certainly deserved a warmer response than it had received. Indeed, on the whole, he was now disposed to believe that he had not been as lover-like as the occasion had demanded.

"How keenly," he reflected, "a woman notices a man's manner when she's in love, and how very quick she is to count up every omitted kiss and tender word. Upon my word, I believe I'll marry in a month or two, and end the boredom of being engaged. Nine girls out of ten have such vague, impossible notions of how a man should act in such a relationship. It's difficult to come up to their expectations."

From Milly his thoughts reverted to his old playmate. "Her saucy little ladyship is by no means sure that she likes me yet. By George! I'd like to make

her tell a different story. Milly's not bad-looking, but she's killed beside the other. I wonder if she'd object to my cultivating her new friend a little? I suppose she'd be jealous. Women always are. I'd better let the little blue-eyed siren alone."

He turned into the lane that led to the house. The night was not dark, and before he had gone many steps he discovered that some one was standing in the path a few rods ahead. As he advanced, the figure walked towards him and he recognized Kate Felton.

"In the name of all that's wonderful, Kathie, where are you going at this hour?" he exclaimed in genuine surprise.

"Hush, don't speak so loud," whispered the girl. "I knew where you were. I saw you go past, and I've been waiting because—because I wanted to see you. It's been so long, so long! Do you realize how long it's been?"

"Yes," he replied, purposely misunderstanding her. "It's been about three hours. It was awfully good of you, Kathie, to wait up for me."

"You knew what I meant," she said, quickly, turning and walking with him in the direction of the woods. "You knew I meant about your being away. I thought you were never coming home."

Her tone and manner betrayed suppressed excitement. She wore no hat; her beautiful hair had escaped from the confining pins and lay in a loose coil on her shoulders. Her dark eyes were unusually restless. Her red gingham dress, parted at the throat, revealed the full beauty of her white, shapely neck. As he looked at her, a feeling akin to regret swept over him. He remembered her tears, her passionate self-denunciation, her almost sullen surrender to the influence of

the love that he had awakened. He wished that he had told her about his engagement to Milly before he left home. She had heard the rumor of it then, and had more than once charged him with its truth, but he had always succeeded in laughing away the idea. To-night, however, he knew the admission must be made.

They stood at length under an old oak tree at the end of the lane. For a few moments, neither had spoken. Edging away from him a little, she said abruptly,

"I tried all day, when I heard you were coming home, to make up some excuse, to convince myself that my wish to see you wasn't unnatural, and that I had a perfect right to meet you, just as much as any other friend."

"Of course you have," he interrupted.

"In one sense, perhaps, but," she continued, in a lower tone, the defiant ring in her voice subsiding, "I—I wish I knew, Laurie, just what you think of me—just what you think of my waylaying you like this."

The bitter conviction that she did not stand very high in his estimation made her miserable, but did not give her the strength to strive for and merit the degree of respect and regard that she craved.

It is a remarkable fact, and characteristic of women of Kate Felton's impetuous nature, that, though they intuitively know the construction that a man is likely to put upon their conduct, they bow their heads in sorrowful self-acknowledgment, and weakly fail, in every instance, to shake off the influence.

Her companion felt that some deep, unhappy thought must have provoked her last question, and, for the time, he was contrite and full of sympathy.

"My dear girl, what do I think of you? I think, if you realized how much I'd give to see you deservedly happy, you'd believe my opinion was a good one. I understand you far better than you think I do. Come, cheer up, and listen, Kathie. You're troubling your sensitive little heart with the fancy that—that you're lowering yourself by being frank and confidential and telling me your thoughts, and—well, in short, keeping up the old fancy; but the very fact that you do remember, makes you all the more womanly and lovable. Upon my word, Kathie, I'd give anything if I could undo the past. I was a coward of the worst kind, for I knew all along what the end must be. I should have kept my feelings to myself."

"No, no," she said, hastily, "I don't regret that you came, because I was happy, and it's nice to have something pleasant to think about. I understood then. Only—only——"

"Only what?"

"I want to ask you something. I came out to ask you."

"Well, what is it?" he said.

"Are you—are you going to marry your cousin?"

The directness of the question disconcerted him, and once more he ardently wished that he had told her about Milly before.

"People say you are," she went on, not giving him time to reply. "Are you afraid to tell me? Do you think I'd faint or upbraid you? Do you think I was not sure you'd take advantage of such a chance? I know how fond you are of money, and she will bring you plenty. But, as God hears me, I wouldn't change places with her if I could."

"I suppose not," he said, coolly. "If you'll give me

a chance, Kathie, I'll tell you about it." He was wondering just how much of the truth it was best to reveal. "If you remember, I went away very unexpectedly. For ten days before going I hadn't seen you. If I'd had an opportunity, I should have told you then what I intended doing. Heaven knows, it took me long enough to make up my mind. Of my cousin, we need not speak. She's too good for me of course. You, at least, know how one-sided the union will be as regards love. But, since everything was against my having the woman I wanted, could I have done better than I have? The idea of being a penniless, cynical old bachelor, is abhorrent. I tell you, we've got to look out for ourselves in this world.

Stepping back a little, she tried to see his face. A flood of passionate revulsion animated her for the moment.

"What in the world did I ever see in you to love?" she said. "God help the girl you marry."

He laughed.

"You're very complimentary. Come, tell me what you've been doing all summer."

"Working. I couldn't stay at home."

"Working! You?"

"Yes. I wish I was out of the world."

"Then I'd never see you," he returned in the old seductive tone, the spell of her past attractiveness swaying him once again. "Life's hard enough, Kathie, look at it as you will. After all, money is not love."

"But you were willing enough to accept the substitute," she said, quickly.

"I'm going to have both. I can't live without one any more than the other."

The hot blood surged to the roots of her hair. Re-

coiling as if he had struck her, she buried her face in her hands.

"Kathie, look up. What did I say? Do you think because I'm engaged to another, our friendship is doomed?"

He drew her arm gently within his own and led her out from the shade of the great tree.

Pausing just before they reached the cottage, she said, with an evident effort to speak calmly,

"You may not believe me, but this is the last night I shall ever meet you. For the first time since I've known you, I'm forced to believe that you're thoroughly unprincipled, not to say wicked. Your cousin loves you, of course, or she wouldn't marry you. She's a good woman. She may reform you."

"Did you meet me to give me this pretty lecture?" he asked.

"I don't know. Perhaps I did. It's the kindest thing I can do for you."

"And the most unwelcome. A woman's sympathy is very perishable and never directed to those most in need of it. However, it shall be as you say. For the sake of the past, for the sake of the hours we've spent together, don't go in with that hard look on your face." He spoke persuasively. Suddenly a hot tear fell on the hand that grasped her own, and then, in another instant, he held her unresistingly in his arms.

"By Jove, I will see you," he whispered, fiercely. "Who's to prevent it?"

"No, no," she cried, freeing herself from his embrace. Stepping back to the gate, near which they now stood, she remained for a moment, full of anger against him for tempting her, yet with a sense of wild, irrational happiness.



"What time do you get home at night?" he persisted. "What do you say to Friday nights?"

"I mustn't meet you, for—for her sake."

"My dear girl, what possible harm is there in it?"

"I see how it will all end," she said, wistfully. "I must go away. I should be happier in some other place, if it wasn't. . . . Listen. What was that?"

A slight rustling in the long grass on the other side of the fence caused them both to start. "Ezra," she whispered. "He's waiting up for me. Let me go."

"Why don't your father make that boy stay in the house nights?"

"Father makes him do nothing."

"I wish I had the governing of him. He's afflicted and all that, of course, but he needn't make himself so disagreeable by this eternal sneaking around and listening. He hates me, that's a sure thing."

"Yes," she said, briefly; "I think he does."

"And I never did the boy any harm. Oh, well, he's not accountable, I suppose, for his likes and dislikes."

Leaning over the gate that she had put between them, he again attempted to draw her to him, but this time she shrank back.

A moment later, he was walking quickly through the woods towards home, already beginning to repent of his recent tenderness.

"She took it pretty cool about Milly," he soliloquized. "Poor girl, she does have a hard life of it. It's almost a charity to be kind to her, and yet——" With a quick, sudden movement, he reached out into the darkness, and caught by the jacket the squirming figure of a boy. "You little snake! What do you mean by this?"

he demanded, roughly. "I've half a mind to thrash you," he cried, feeling rather than seeing the burning defiance that gleamed in the fellow's eyes. No sound had escaped the white, quivering lips, and, as the hand on his coat released its hold, he slunk away among the trees.

When Laurie entered the library, he found Robert dozing in an arm-chair.

"How long have you been in?" inquired his brother, when he had aroused him. "Come into the studio, Rob, and have a smoke. I'm rather done up, travelling all last night."

"No doubt," said the other, lazily stretching his long limbs. "I suppose Milly was a trifle glad to see you," he continued.

"Well, rather," said his brother, complacently. "By the way, since when have you taken to a pipe? How the prospect of matrimony changes a man's habits. When is it to come off, Robert?"

"Three weeks from Thursday," he answered. "Edna was at the house to-night, I hear. What do you think of her?" he asked, curiously.

"Of her looks, do you mean? Oh, she's a pretty little girl. She always was, if I remember rightly. Not much like her sister, I should judge."

"No," said Robert, with sudden warmth, "they're not alike. You're right. You'd never imagine they were relatives. Edna's a thoughtless little butterfly, but I tell you she makes every one stand around."

"A tempestuous young lady?" inquired his companion.

"Oh, no, but she'll wheedle people into doing anything she wants them to do. Never saw anything like it in my life. I don't know how she manages it, but

Neta's no match for her. She accepts every word her diplomatic little sister utters."

"Indeed? You'll have to look out for your charming sister-in-law and hold her in check. I suppose, of course, she'll live with you?"

"Certainly, till she marries. She's going on nineteen, but I fancy she intends to marry only where there is money."

"Nonsense! I never knew a young and pretty woman who didn't say that and ninety-nine times out of a hundred, they'll marry the first man they chance to fall in love with, if he hasn't a dollar in the world. Women are not very calculative."

Robert shrugged his shoulders. "That may be so with the majority, but it is hard to be sure where acting leaves off and reality begins. We men are such conceited animals. They act upon this wise counsel, 'If you can't make a man love you, fill him up to the brim with love of himself, and all that runs over will be yours.'"

"Oh, well," said his brother, with a yawn, "I don't mind being fooled if the operation's pleasant. Half the unhappiness in the world is the result of a certain morbid curiosity that possesses some people to find out the true opinion their neighbors have formed of them. What's the use? If society smiles in your face, that's enough."

"By the way," said Robert, presently, "when do you expect to marry? Milly will take off mourning in the fall. Doubtless Aunt Penelope will want to have a big wedding."

"I shouldn't wonder. But we won't be married before spring. I'm not in a hurry. Then we'll run over to the other side."

"You will be able to afford it. I think you'll have tolerably clear sailing all through. You'll be proprietor here some day. It's quite clear you are the Captain's favorite. As for me, I much prefer my own little box on the other side of the town."

"Your tastes have suddenly grown very simple. Your lady-love has greatly changed you already. What about the Norwood bank? Have you decided to accept?"

"Oh, long ago. But Helmky doesn't leave till the end of September—just about the time we shall get home."

"Where will you spend the honeymoon?"

"In Washington."

A distant clock pealed forth the hour of twelve.

As he was about to leave the room, Robert turned to his brother.

"By the way, Laurie, I met Kate Felton the other day, coming from Norwood. I was sorry to see her so changed. For Milly's sake, for her own sake, let her alone in the future. You've caused her great unhappiness in the past, but it would be contemptible to keep the thing up."

"What makes you think I'm 'keeping the thing up,' as you call it?"

"Because it would be like you."

"If you think it's time for a lecture, I think it's time to go to bed. But I'm going into the cellar for some ice first."

"I don't want anything to drink, if that's what you mean."

"No? Against orders, I suppose! It's refreshing to see a man do what a woman tells him behind her back. I wonder if you'll do the same when you are married."

## CHAPTER XIV.

JANET'S wedding-day was drawing near. The summer had been the happiest she had ever known, and happiness lent a new charm to her thoughtful face. Life to her now seemed full of wondrous possibilities. Even in her working hours her thoughts dwelt continually on the future.

Looking back on the dreary years that were gone, the memory of her silent rebellion and hidden discontent with her lot, filled her with forebodings.

"It is not so much what I did, as what I did not do," she said, sadly, one night to Robert, when speaking of the past. I think every man and woman is given opportunities—some few, some many—by which they may benefit others. But I feel that my early ambition to stand at the head of our little home was not a noble one. I fear I am too selfish."

"You selfish! What an idea! Neta, you are the soul of disinterestedness."

The latter part of the summer had been devoted to the renovation of their home. Carpenters, masons, decorators, gardeners, were fast transforming the old gray house into the most attractive and picturesque of buildings.

Neal forced himself to take an active part in the adornment of the new place. Robert had swung two hammocks between the trees on the lawn, and here the cousins spent many hours together, going over plans and prospects. Robert was eager, boyish—while Neal,

dreamily admiring the fleecy clouds above him, puffed waves of smoke about his head and listened.

"Are you asleep?" asked Robert one afternoon, when his cousin had maintained a longer silence than usual. "Donnerly asked me this morning about making a new door for the wine cellar. The old one is battered and broken and the lock no good at all."

"Wine cellar?" repeated Neal, with a slight start. "What are you going to do with a wine cellar?"

"That's not a very sensible question, is it?" said Robert. "What do you suppose?"

"Well, it implies that you intend keeping wine in the house. Janet will never agree to that."

"Neta's not a fanatic on temperance," said the young man, hotly. "Of course I know what you apprehend."

"There," interrupted his companion, "I spoke unguardedly, Rob. I insinuated nothing. I believe in getting off the track before the locomotive's in sight. You believe in sticking to the rails. It is a mere difference of opinion."

"There's no truer saying in the world than: 'Give a dog a bad name and then hang him.' By Jove, I'm thankful there's one who doesn't consider me so unreliable."

Neal made no reply.

Donnerly received orders to make all needed repairs in the wine cellar, but time never revealed aught secreted there but long rows of Janet's preserves.

August closed, and the cottage in Bolton Place presented a changed appearance. Baggage of all description was systematically piled up awaiting removal. Even Edna had caught the general spirit of active preparation and was reducing Janet to the verge of despair

with her peculiar method of packing her especial belongings.

"What's the difference, Neta, so long as they go? You will exercise your privilege of being an old maid up to the last moment, won't you? There, if that soft felt hat isn't a good place for a toilet bottle, I'd like you to find a better one."

Janet was not superstitious, but when she awoke the following morning, with the quick consciousness that it was her wedding-day, a feeling of glad, happy relief filled her heart at the sight of the dismantled sunlight that peered in through the blinds of the windows.

The ceremony was to be performed in the church, with only the immediate members of the two families present. After the breakfast, the newly-married pair were to start at once for Washington, Edna and the blind man going to the homestead to await their return.

When they reached the church and were walking up the aisle, the bride's eyes were almost vacant in the intensely strained expression with which they wandered to the group seated in the front pews. Captain Cameron, pompous and dignified, as befitted the occasion. Laurie, handsome and unusually animated, seated near Milly, upon whom, as the bridal party entered, he appeared to be devoting his whole attention; Miss Penelope, soberly attired in black, as far from the Captain as circumstances would permit, and lastly, Neal. Janet had never seen him so white before, and her hasty view of his face, as she passed him, startled her.

The tones of the white-haired minister fell upon her ear, as he slowly and solemnly spoke the words that bound her to the man at her side, till death should part them. In a dream, she took her way back to the

door; in a dream she heard the confused mingling of voices in the vestibule, as different people came up to offer their congratulations, and then she found herself in the coach that was to take them to Norwood, Robert whispering in her ear his happiness and relief to get away from them all and be thus alone together.

"Your face is as pale as death, darling," he said, playfully pinching her cheeks. "It is a kind of solemn thing to get married, isn't it, though I suppose people get used to it, like everything else. Little did I think last year at this time how happy I'd be to-day. Kiss me, Neta, and tell me that you are happy."

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## CHAPTER XV.

It is natural to look back upon past pleasures, and fancy that our enjoyment, though keen, was not filled with the full, heartfelt, throbbing consciousness of delight its repetition would produce in us now.

In after years, Janet often reverted to the night upon which she entered her new home. It was evening when the train reached Norwood. The coach which they took at the station travelled quickly along the familiar road. She strained her eyes in the darkness, in silent greeting to the old landmarks. How sweet it was to be at home again!

"And we've only been gone three weeks," Robert said, laughing. "I don't believe you'd ever be happy away from Causauqua. I wonder if Neal will be over to-night. We ought to give a house-warming in a week or so, after we get straightened out. We're almost home, darling."



"Oh, Robert, the lights! We're turning into the drive. Hear the dead leaves."

The carriage stopped, and, as the door opened, four waiting figures, standing on the porch, made their presence known.

"Neta, Neta, what a long time it has taken you to come from Norwood. Kiss me, darling. Oh, how sweet you look! Brother Robert, I didn't kiss you in the church, but I will now. Neta's satchel! I'll carry that. Let's shut the door. Isn't it lovely in here? Oh, Neta, isn't this the sweetest, dearest, old house under the sun?"

Laughing, dancing, chattering, scarcely giving the others a chance to say a word, Edna led the way to the sitting-room, in which a blazing wood fire was crackling with cheery warmth.

"There," said Robert, at length, "Neta has kissed you all. Now, may we have something to eat? I hope the cupboard's not quite empty, Aunt Lydia?"

"The table's set and tea is waiting, and your brand-new waitress, is doubtless complaining to your brand-new cook, at the present moment, about the delay," said Edna, not giving Mrs. Durward an opportunity to reply.

The pretty dining-room at the end of the hall looked very inviting to the hungry travellers. The square table, adorned with dainty Haviland china and delicate cut glass, bore in the centre a large bunch of chrysanthemums, their beauty doubled by the oval mirror on which they stood.

After the meal was over and the others had retired, Robert said to his wife: "It looks as if Neal wasn't coming."

"He will come to-morrow, surely," she said, quietly.

Drawing a low chair close to her side, he said :

"Has it been a happy home-coming, darling? Your face tells me, your eyes tell me, but I seem to want the actual words from your own lips."

"Happy?" she began, gently touching his forehead with her soft fingers, "inexpressibly happy. But," she added wistfully, "I want to be deserving of it, Robert. I should be afraid to live on selfishly just for ourselves. I must regulate my time, and set an hour aside every day that some one else may feel the benefit of my exertions. Don't you think so, Robert?"

The question met with his hearty acquiescence. In his opinion, what could she not do! This longing to adorn her life with kind deeds, a phase of charity that the presence of sudden happiness so often entails, touched him, and, in his own way, he emphatically sanctioned every aspiration she made known.

The first few days succeeding their arrival were devoted to the settling of various trivial matters, Edna's interest being centred in her own apartment. Here, according to her own account, she worked "like a Trojan." And a characteristic little sanctum it was when she announced that her arrangements were complete.

Robert's idea of giving a reception she had received with the keenest delight.

"Although you didn't have a wedding, Neta, it's the proper thing to do. People expect it."

Preparations for the event were at once begun, the anticipation of which was evidently as pleasing to Robert as to Edna.

The management of a house was nothing new to Robert's wife—the management of servants certainly was. And at first she found the task of directing more difficult than performing the tasks herself.

They had been at home about ten days, when Robert took his position in the Norwood Bank. This was the first time he had left her for more than an hour or two, since their marriage. She felt his absence keenly, although her time was fully occupied. She missed his laugh about the place, his cheery, boyish efforts to assist in anything that she might be doing.

Her faith and confidence in him throughout these halcyon days remained undisturbed. Love, she argued, was his shield. He would surely never fall back into the old paths now. All that was good and true and manly in him was awakened. In the darkness of the night her full heart cried out for wisdom and strength to so fill his life that every interest of his impulsive nature might flow in higher, better, more ennobling channels.

The date of the reception was fixed for the seventeenth of November.

Questions of dress monopolized Edna's attention for some days and took her frequently to Norwood. Riding in with Robert one morning, she asked what caterer he had engaged.

"Because," said she, "if Aunt Lydia never influenced Neta in any other way, she succeeded, long ago, in making her a temperance fanatic. Have you ever broached the subject of champagne?"

"I haven't said anything about it," he returned, giving the horse a sharp slap with the reins, "but it strikes me we can get along without it."

"Then it won't be a swell affair at all," said his sister-in-law, pouting. "Do you expect your friends to drink your health and happiness with coffee?"

"Edna, if every friend I have in the world calls me a crank, and the whole thing turns out a dead

failure, I won't have Neta vexed. She hasn't many prejudices, and this one, if it is a prejudice, shall be respected."

"Oh, then you don't intend to mention the subject? Brother Robert, I believe you're afraid. Have you and Neta quarrelled yet? Have you ever shown her any of your temper? I am disposed to believe you can be awfully cross."

"No," he said, briefly, "I'm not a brute."

"Oh, you all think that when you're just married. Every bit of evil temper in you is dead, and to get angry with one another, impossible; but such delusions soon vanish. I would not marry a man unless I thought I could make him angry once in a while, if only for the fun of making up."

"Well," he said, reflectively, "I don't doubt but what you'll succeed; but suppose you get hold of some stubborn customer, who won't receive your smiles when you are ready to bestow them, what then?"

"I'll let him severely alone and then my stubborn gentleman will sue for peace at once. But to return to the supper, have you really made up your mind to let Neta set the stamp of a primitive country tea-party upon it, or——"

"What is the use of talking about it?" he replied shortly. "I told you she should not be worried." But, even as he spoke, he determined to ascertain just exactly how strong his wife's wishes were on the subject. "I saw Laurie yesterday afternoon," he remarked, as they turned into the main street. "He was going to New York on the fourteenth, but he has consented to remain over for the reception. Milly is naturally anxious he should go with her."

As Robert was handing her out at the dressmaker's,

he said, rather confusedly, "Don't say anything to Neta about that."

"About what?"

"You know what we were talking about."

"Oh," she said, laughing, "you mean to broach the subject yourself? You have risen in my estimation. Go in and win. I wish I could help you." Without giving him time to reply, she threw him a glance of merriment from her blue eyes and disappeared.

"I've a good mind not to dance with him once." She was thinking of Laurie, while she waited in the dressmaker's reception-room. "So Milly's teased him into staying. I hate a man who has to be teased to do a thing. Were I in her place, I'd pack his valise, if he wouldn't do it himself, and start him off on the fourteenth."

Thus ran the current of her thoughts as she examined the fashion-plates. It was, however, much better that he should go away for a time, she reflected. It was actually becoming troublesome to make him understand that Milly had the first claim on his society. When he was gone she would feel so much freer to visit Milly. Perhaps, when he came back, his conduct would be more conventional.

That night, in their own room, Robert stole softly behind Janet's chair, as she sat brushing her hair, and put his hand on her shoulder.

"Neta, I saw Thompson, the caterer, to-day."

"Yes?" she said, interested at once.

"And I ordered supper in his very best style. I told him I wanted everything first-class. He asked what kind of wines we'd have."

"Wines, Robert?" She turned and looked at him with questioning eyes. "Is that necessary?"

"Well—not absolutely necessary, but all these people are accustomed to that sort of thing, you know. They will expect it, and, of course, a man doesn't want to be considered mean."

"I had not thought," she said, slowly. "Remember, I know little or nothing of what such occasions require. I don't want to make you uncomfortable before your guests; but oh, Robert, I do so wish that we could do without it."

"That's enough. We won't have any at all. Let them think what they like."

"At heart, dear, they'll respect you," she said, stroking the hand that rested on the back of her chair. "Ellen shall make us some of her delicious coffee, and——"

"I believe I'd consent to Ellen brewing us dainty cups of hemlock, if you so willed it," he murmured, stooping to tenderly kiss her. And the grateful, happy look upon her face amply repaid him for this surrender to her wishes.

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## CHAPTER XVI.

"THIS party will wake you up a little," said Miss Penelope to her nephew on the morning of the seventeenth. "You're growing old by the minute, Neal. When you're not shut up here in the house, you're tramping off somewhere by yourself."

"The next time I go fishing, I'll take you with me."

"Fishing, indeed! People don't go fishing without a rod."

"My fish require none, though they are very wary."

The bait, I suppose you know, is concentration, for the fish I seek in these solitary tramps are ideas."

But his joking tone did not banish the cloud from her face. She was sitting at his desk, with a book of accounts before her, ready for the weekly inspection. Twice she dipped the pen in the ink, but her attention wandered to the young man lounging on the sofa.

"I suppose the Captain and his sister-in-law will be there to-night?" she said, after a pause.

"Undoubtedly."

"If he ever intends to marry that woman, it's high time he did it. He must know everybody in town is speculating on the possibility. I wonder how Milly would get along with her."

"Milly? Oh, she'll be Elinore Railson's daughter-in-law if the Captain succumbs. I never thought of that."

"I have," said Miss Penelope. "Neal, I wish the poor child would wake up. Think what a life is before her. They will be away, no doubt, most of the time—but when she is at home, what a home it will be! It has been quite clear to my mind, from the first, that he doesn't love her as she loves him. His engagement doesn't seem to keep him from his capers. She only smiles and trots at his heels in a way that ought to melt a heart of stone. She is the only angel he will ever meet."

Her nephew did not reply.

"Things might have been so different."

"How?" asked Neal, lazily.

"How? What was there to prevent your being in Laurie's place?" demanded his companion, laying down her pen.

"My being in Laurie's place? How could I have been in his place?"

"Why didn't you fall in love with her? I don't approve of cousins marrying, but, in this case, I'd been glad, oh, so glad, Neal. You couldn't have helped being happy with her."

Mastering an inclination to laugh at the partiality of this reasoning, he got up, and walked towards the window.

"But, of course, I know it's useless to talk of this now," concluded Miss Penelope.

"She is as dear to me, Aunt, as she is to you. But there is one dearer still; and it troubles me to see her worrying over a question that neither she nor any mortal living can change. Remember, Milly does not see as we see, and the chances are that she never will."

"You may be right. But, poor child, he doesn't treat her well. Only a day or two ago he told her to come and show him how she looked in her new dress. It was a pretty dark-blue serge. When he had looked her over, he only said that the color brought out the orange in her complexion. I was there and heard him."

"What did she say?"

"Nothing. She just went back to her room. But I said something, you may believe, and I didn't choose my words either. But there—he's too much like Robert. You cannot scold him with any satisfaction, and he never gets angry. I think, though, at heart he was ashamed, for that night he took her for a moonlight drive and the next day he brought her a diamond bangle. But, do you know," lowering her voice, as a woman invariably does when she imparts information supposed to go no further than her listener, "I think he is inclined to pay too much attention to Edna Morvick."



"Do you? What makes you think that?"

"I'm not blind. But just watch her sometimes and see how she snubs him. Thursday night I was amused. He takes his snubbings seriously. I suppose," she continued, "there will be a dreadful crush to-night? Rather out of Janet's line, don't you think so?"

"Whatever Robert plans pleases Janet."

"Yes, she is very fond of him, and he is devoted to her. Every day he grows more like his mother. I have no fear of him now. I would not have believed that she could change him as she has."

Neal had often noted Janet's eyes as they rested on her husband's face and observed the great content and happiness there shining.

"Would it last?" he asked himself. He was unable to rid himself of the old apprehensions for her future. Confronted with this smiling peace, why should these past doubts creep back? Was her woman's reasoning all at fault? Had she rightly measured the strength of the man she loved? Did she yet know his weakness? Would not her own tact teach her how to safely guide him? Would not the force of her love prevail? These were questions which he could not answer.

The seventeenth at last arrived.

Janet wore white velvet, unrelieved by jewelry or ribbon, only around her neck was clasped a string of pearls. She was pale, but her beautiful calm eyes were an attraction none could fail to notice, and all present were soon engaged in watching the graceful figure of their hostess, as she moved through the rooms.

Robert himself, happy and elated over the impression he knew she was making, was more than ordinarily jovial. His good-natured face fairly beamed on the people who were admiring his wife.

"By Jove," he remarked, aside to Neal, when silence on the subject had become impossible, "she puts the other women simply in the shade. And you would think she had been used to this sort of thing all her life, wouldn't you?"

Neal agreed, rather absent-mindedly.

"Have you seen Edna?" continued Robert, looking around the assembly. "Ah, there she is." And his companion, whose eyes had been persistently following Janet, turned in the direction indicated.

Never before had Neal considered her as lovely as he was forced to do to-night. But her beauty was so different from Janet's, that he felt the same term could not apply to both.

Laurie and Milly were among the last to arrive, and after they had found Janet, Laurie turned his attention to the girl at his side.

"You don't know many people here, I fancy, but, when this dance is over, Rob and I will see that you are introduced. Will you waltz?"

"Oh, Laurie, you know I do not waltz, that is, not very well."

"No one will notice. There are too many couples on the floor. Come," and she obediently allowed him to lead her out. He waltzed, as he did everything else that society expected, to perfection—but he possessed all a good dancer's horror of a poor partner, and before they had taken many turns he was inclined to agree with Milly's protest. "I must give you a few private lessons," he whispered; "you haven't quite the best step."

"I—I'm tired; that is," she continued more truthfully, "I should prefer you to dance with some one that pleases you better. I love to look on. I'm not a

success as a dancer. Please, take me to Aunt Penelope."

Neal did not care for dancing and had taken a position behind Miss Penelope's chair, to be out of the way of those who did. He nodded as Milly joined him and announced an intention of being an onlooker also for the rest of the evening. He was watching Laurie's unceremonious haste to get to Edna. That young lady knew who was seeking her so eagerly, but she pretended not to see him, until he extended his hand for her card.

"How many? May I tax your generosity?" he asked, in a low tone, as her first partner bore himself off. "The waltzes? Let me have the waltzes."

"All?" she said, laughing at the audacity of the request. "Don't you suppose I want to dance with any one else?"

"Spoken with your usual candor," he returned, scribbling down his name.

"Oh, Laurie, not so often. Milly has the first claim, remember."

"Milly can't dance."

"Indeed? What were you doing just before you came up?"

"Wasting the last of a beautiful waltz. Won't you sit down a few minutes? I wonder if you can guess what I came here for to-night?"

"The conundrum is by no means difficult. You came because Milly wanted you to." She met his gaze unflinchingly, but her heart beat a little faster at the expression she read in his eyes.

"Your sister looks very beautiful to-night," he said, after a long pause. "That style of dress is becoming to her."

"Neta was always particular about dress, She has

a style of her own and does not recognize the mandates of fashion. Did you ever see a man more deeply in love than your brother? Doesn't it make you think of your own approaching happiness?

He turned and their eyes met.

"Edna, I want a promise to-night." She started.  
"Oh, I mean a promise good only for an hour or two."

"What is it?"

"Will you promise not to mention Milly, or—or at least our relationship, for just a few hours?"

"It is a strange request."

"How strange?"

"Unusual. I fail to comprehend its meaning."

"I wish I dared to make you understand me."

She looked up at him, her face suddenly growing serious.

"You, in your turn, make a promise. Don't make me understand. I like you better as I've always found you. Startling revelations I detest. Here comes Mr. McMasters. Did you ever see such a queer-looking man?"

But she bestowed a very gracious welcome on him, notwithstanding, when he drew near to claim his dance. Nodding assent to Laurie's reminder that the next number was his, she mingled with the throng.

Later, Laurie found himself her temporary owner. Milly still sitting quietly by Miss Penelope's side, watched them. A tinge of envy entered her breast at the memory of her own inability to dance with him.

"Robert," she said shyly, as her cousin approached, "is it very difficult to get the right step?"

"Waltz step, you mean? Of course not. Easiest thing in the world, though I can't make Neta believe me. But you know how to waltz, Milly. Where's

Laurie? Ah! dancing. Will you have a turn? I've settled the Captain and a few of his cronies in the music-room at whist. Come, will you?"

"Really, Robert, I can't dance. But come into the hall. I want to try a better step."

"And constitute me dancing-master? All right, come ahead."

The music stopped before they had taken many turns and Milly presently found herself at the mercy of a very talkative young man, with teeth of such whiteness they seemed to flash upon you every time their owner opened his mouth.

"Quite a number here," he remarked, when he had found a seat for her; "that is, for a comparatively small house." Never met Mr. Robert's wife before. Fine-looking woman, Mrs. Cameron, but she's rather unapproachable."

"Oh, no," said Milly, "Cousin Janet is a very easy person to talk to. At least, I always thought so."

"Indeed? That young lady talking to Neal Fleming; isn't that her sister? They don't look alike, do they?"

"No, they are not alike," assented Milly, wishing she was back with Aunt Penelope.

"You don't care for waltzing, I see," continued her companion.

"I don't know how."

"Oh, it's not difficult. I used to think I could never learn, but it came to me. This next is a square dance. Will you try it?"

Not liking to refuse, she took his arm, and was led forward to the set in which Edna and Laurie had just taken their places.

Laurie looked at her as though some unpleasant

memory was suddenly aroused—but, after the dance was over, he went across the room to her.

“Are you enjoying yourself? . . . By the way, you have made quite an impression on Lew Paine.”

“What?”

“Now, you’re only pretending not to understand,” he declared, knowing full well that Milly never pretended anything in her life, but being anxious to make her speak to him. “Wait for me to take you in to supper,” he said. And so he left her. Edna’s blue eyes were bewitching him, and for the time he was oblivious to the dictates of prudence.

“I’m going away to-morrow—going away to-morrow,” he kept repeating to himself, as, after supper, he sought her for the last waltz.

“It is half-past one,” he whispered, once more placing his arm around her slender waist. “In less than an hour I shall come back to earth.”

“Where are you now?” she inquired, with a little catching of her breath as they made the first turn of the room.

“In heaven.”

“How sacrilegious!”

“Nothing of the kind. They must waltz in heaven.”

“Laurie, I’m inclined to believe Brother Robert smuggled in champagne, after all, and that you’ve had too much.”

“Oh, I mean everything I say. . . . I’m going away to-morrow.”

“I know it. Milly will cry her pretty eyes out.”

“And you?”

“Oh, I shall not care in the least,” she retorted.

“Edna,” entreatingly, caressingly, “won’t you be kind to me just for one moment? . . . Let us get

some fresh air. Are you afraid to go with me on the veranda?"

"Afraid?"

"I mean without a shawl." She shook her head, and they made their way out. "Isn't this glorious? . . . Now, tell me; won't you miss me when I am away?"

"Why should I miss you?"

"Because I want you to."

"Well, let me assure you I shall not. You are entertaining at times. You are a good dancer. You are going to marry my dearest friend. But, my dear boy, don't spoil the attraction of these qualifications by growing sentimental. I value your pretty speeches and your appreciation of my society at just what they are worth. But this sort of thing becomes monotonous after a while. Try another rôle for a change. For instance, do what conceited men are wont to do, tell me how sweetly Milly treats you, and how much she thinks of you, and——"

"Stop," he said, harshly, "you hurt me. I'll never speak this way to you again, if you say so. Listen. You have a heart. You must understand my position. But to win you I'd throw up everything. People would soon forget. We could go——" She laid a firm hand on his arm. Her face was as white as his own, but he could not see it.

"If," she began coldly, "I have a heart, it is a possession that concerns you very little. Do be sensible, and, once for all, don't imagine I've any idea of caring for you. I would not, even were you free, which you certainly are not. And, instead of reasoning with you here, I ought to leave you at once. Let us go in. Milly must be wondering what I have done with you."

"At all events," he said, moodily, "you've enjoyed our evening."

"Our evening? Why 'our' evening, any more than anybody else's evening?"

"It has been 'our' evening for me, since you are the beginning and the end of it."

She did not reply and they entered the house in silence. He sought his sister-in-law. "I must tell you what I have just been telling Edna, that this has been a very enjoyable affair."

"I am glad," she said, simply. "Edna, will you kindly see where father is?" Laurie turned away; he felt instinctively that he did not stand very high in his new relative's estimation.

Milly, for the last half-hour, had been struggling with new and strange emotions. This evening, that she had looked forward to so expectantly, had not brought her the anticipated pleasure. She confessed to herself that she would far rather have spent it with Laurie at home; his last night with her for two months or more. At thought of the parting so close at hand, she quailed. The vague sense of disappointment that oppressed her was, in reality, due to the fact that she had seen so little of him all through the long evening. A caress, a simple drawing of the brown head down upon his shoulder, in the seclusion of the coach that took them home and she was happy again.

"Laurie," she said, shyly, her tender conscience charging her with recent discontent, "I was envious to-night."

"Envious? Of whom?" he asked, hastily.

"Oh, no one in particular; the other girls in general. I felt that I was so uninteresting."



"My timid little girl, I'm sure no one could ever think that."

"You really think so?"

"Really," he returned, warmly, feeling that some reparation was due her.

Up in her own room, Edna Morvick, stood pondering deeply.

"I am glad he is going away to-morrow. I hope, when he comes home, he'll get married the next day, and then—and then," with a gesture full of weariness, "it will be over. I am not altogether wicked. He shall keep his promise to Milly."

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## CHAPTER XVII.

WINTER, attended by storms of snow and sleet and fierce winds, soon succeeded the mellow days of Autumn, with their spasmodic reaching backward for the vanished sunshine. But the year had brought to Janet none of the dreariness that usually accompanies the first cold days and long evenings. Beyond the blind man's peevish fretting, not the smallest element of discord thus far marred the serenity of her life.

Edna entered into the winter festivities with the greatest zest. Neal often accompanied her, because Janet appeared to be pleased when he did. But attendants were never wanting. Edna's recent moods mystified her relatives. For days she would be full of the wildest spirits, dancing about the house, singing from morning till night, and then she would sink into fits of moody silence. At such times she would not

touch the piano, spending hours at a time in her own room, as far as Janet could discover, quite unoccupied, for nothing was ever forthcoming to show in what manner these solitary hours were passed. For a week or two at a stretch she would visit Milly almost daily, and then, without giving the slightest reason, she would absent herself for weeks.

"To my other numerous attractions, I am adding the culminating one of eccentricity," she replied gaily, to Janet's protest one morning. "I am amusing myself in my own way, and our ways are not all alike, you know. Milly's immensely interesting to me at times. She purrs like a little kitten when she's pleased and she really has some very original ideas. And then again, I can't liken her to anything but an ultra-conscientious little egotist, or, in Brother Robert's more expressive language, 'a little crank.' Do I shock you? . . . Here comes Uncle Anthony. I'll open the door."

Anthony Durward, with his wrinkled face, reddened by the keen air, his eyes blurred with old age and his hands fumbling feebly to extricate themselves from his big mittens, entered the warm room, and gladly settled down in the low chair that Janet promptly wheeled up to the hearth.

"I am going to bring my work and sit with you," she said, kindly.

It did her heart good to see the old man's expression of supreme content as he held his chilled fingers to the comfortable blaze. She brought him a pair of Robert's slippers. "You are going to stay to luncheon with us?"

"Your Aunt Lydia, Janet?" he protested.

"Aunt Lydia will not object. She told me the

other day she always felt comfortable when you were here, for then you were not only safe, but 'free from mischief.' "

"How's Robert?" he inquired. "Well and happy I doubt not," he continued, as she took a seat near him. "I met Ezra Felton coming over. Poor lad! he's failed these last six months, and is more wild than ever. When he saw me he ran up with the question folks say he is all the time asking nowadays——"

"About Kathie," Janet interrupted. "Isn't it pitiful? Whenever I see him around, I make him come in. The other afternoon I was alone when he came and he stayed with me fully two hours. Occasionally he seemed to understand me and talked quite rationally. Then he would wander off again and mutter: 'I cannot find her, I cannot find her. What a strange girl his sister must be.'"

"Indeed she is," said the old man nodding his head, "and so was her mother before her. When she gets weary of staying away she'll come home, and not a bit sooner."

"Don't you suppose her father knows where she is?"

"I doubt it."

Janet was silent. She was thinking of what Robert had told her one evening about his brother's flirtation with Kate Felton. Poor Kathie! Why was she in exile? Did she never give a thought to the devoted heart at home, wearing itself away in patient watching for her return?

About a month after the reception, Robert surprised his wife one night by telling her he had invited the Paines to dinner on the following day.

"Tell Ellen to surpass herself. You've met Lew,

you know, but Tom, I think, will please you best. Of course, I ought to have consulted you first, but I never thought of it."

"Oh, no, I was only thinking——" she began, striving to throw off her disappointment that he should have renewed this intimacy with two men who were so closely associated in her mind with past anxiety.

"They're real steady fellows now," he went on reassuringly; "Tom's engaged to Cora Biglow and has quite settled down. What are you thinking of, dear? Let us have no secrets."

"Do you see much of them, Robert, during the day?" she asked.

"Oh, yes, I see them very often and lunch with Tom two or three times a week. Didn't I mention it?"

"No," she said, slowly.

"Well, it was not much to tell, but I certainly thought I had spoken of it. Where's Edna to-night? Out again?"

"Yes, Milly and Neal went to a lecture." She folded her work and put it away and then turned down the light, so that only a soft glow was shed about the room and went to the piano.

"Something sweet and low," he suggested. "I wish I could have your picture taken with that red light shining on your hair." He leaned back in his chair, and watched her.

"As she played, a strange presentiment took possession of her. Twice, three times, she had all but turned to ask him to give up his acquaintance with these men, for whom, although she was not justified in feeling so perhaps, she entertained so much repugnance.

"I really know nothing of them," she reflected. "I must get Neal to tell me all about them."

The following evening the sisters sat in the reception-room, waiting for the sound of wheels.

"It strikes me Robert has a deal of company," observed John Morvick, crossly. At times he was averse to meeting strangers.

"And it has struck me forcibly that we don't have enough," returned his younger daughter. "Listen, here they are!" Her brother-in-law's voice was presently heard in the hall, where he and his guests were taking off their overcoats. Then, bringing in with them a keen breath of winter air, Robert had advanced into the room and was introducing them to his wife.

With an almost questioning glance of her dark eyes, Janet studied the faces of her visitors. Tom Paine, the one Robert had decided she would favor, resembled his brother in the matter of features and complexion, but his countenance was more open. He laughed more, talked louder, and was, without doubt, the more genial of the two. Janet found herself criticizing her husband's opinion of the brothers. But she smiled in her own sweet way, and was altogether so friendly that Robert instantly glowed with relief. He had felt that Janet did not approve of his invitation. He had a vague idea that women always like to know beforehand who is coming, and he resolved to be more careful in future.

John Morvick had left the room. Edna and Robert were deep in a political argument with one another, and Lew, as it chanced, fell to Janet to entertain.

"This is an awfully pretty place of yours, Mrs. Cameron," he began; "must be lovely in summer, but nothing could induce me to live here in winter."

"Then you don't live here in Causauqua?"

"No, my folks do, but Tom and I have rooms in Norwood. Causauqua is very dull, don't you think?"

"I'm hardly qualified to judge, for I have never lived in any other place."

"Is that a fact? Your husband will have to take you out more. Excuse me, Mrs. Cameron, but I declare you've changed him greatly. Never knew a fellow to turn about so in a few months. I was acquainted with him out West, you know. He showed me your picture one night. 'The sweetest girl God ever made,' he said to me. I remember asking him why he did not take steps to lessen the distance between you. Oh, Rob was a great boy then; but, of course, you know it's perfectly natural for a young man to sow a few wild oats."

"So I have been told," she remarked, briefly.

"Your tone is rather severe, Mrs. Cameron. I am willing to acknowledge that this world would be a mighty dreary place without your charming sex, but let me tell you they make one grand mistake and wreck their own happiness persistently, when they attempt the homely operation of tying their husbands to their apron-strings. No man likes to feel that after he's married every enjoyment of his bachelorhood must be laid on the shelf. His wife goes calling, riding and shopping, just as she did before, but he is expected to come home night after night, put on his slippers and lengthen out the honeymoon for fifty years. I tell you such a prospect has frightened me away from the altar more than once."

She looked at him with a quizzical smile.

"Perhaps," she said, quietly, "you will now draw a picture of the course we should pursue. My acquaintance with bachelors has been so slight, I fear I cannot

appreciate all they relinquish when they become Benedicts."

He laughed.

"No man honestly in love ever fancies he's relinquishing anything when he wins his 'fair lady.' I referred to the inevitable calm that is bound to settle upon them in time. This is awfully sad to contemplate, upon my word it is, and therefore I say, women who are so generally acknowledged our superior in the question of possessing more delicate perceptions, should make better use of their insight, and keep around them more of the enticing uncertainty, if I may so express it, that made them so enchanting in the days of their courtship. There's no reason on earth why a woman should ever exchange her lover for a husband, but, in the majority of cases, that is precisely what she does, and why? Simply because she will forever gauge his feelings and inclinations by her own, and they're about as similar as day and night."

"You would advise, then," said his companion, infinitely amused, "a varied diet of smiles and frowns. When he expected the former, bestow the latter. What effect would that have upon the monotony of matrimonial companionship?"

"You think I am joking, don't you; or else talking to hear myself talk, but wait till my words are verified in your own case. Now Rob——" But a sudden change in her expression made him pause. He saw instantly that it would not do to be personal with Robert's wife. She was handsome, unquestionably, and evidently very much more determined in character than his old friend, but straight-laced, and, as he afterwards explained to his brother, decidedly repelling if you should chance to give her offence.

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The meal that followed was the most uncomfortable one that Janet had yet eaten in her new home. She had but little to say, for she was listening to the joking remarks that floated up to her from the other end of the table, remarks pointed at Robert and his sudden allegiance to the Blue Ribbon army. At last it was over and the men adjourned to the billiard-room to smoke.

"I question Brother Robert's taste," said Edna, seating herself at the piano. "What is the matter, Neta? Your face is too white for your dress. Those rollicking youths will be in here in a moment. They are of the kind, I fancy, who frequently go to sleep under the table."

"They are gentlemen," interrupted Janet. "You know nothing about them and are not justified in making such a speech."

"My dear, how do you know I know nothing about them? But there, we won't pick them to pieces while they're in the house. Here they come."

Later in the evening, when Edna was playing for them, Robert crossed the room, and touched Janet on the shoulder.

"I've ordered Parker to harness Pinto to the surrey," he said in a low tone, under cover of the music. "I think I'll drive in with the boys, Neta. You don't mind, do you? I'll be back by eleven."

"But it's so cold, Robert," she began, his words giving her a sudden chill.

"Oh, no, we'll take the heavy robe. Don't sit up for me, if you're tired. And, darling, you don't care?"

But Edna had turned from the piano so she could only nod her head in answer.

She followed them to the hall and held Robert's coat



for him. She gave Robert's guests her soft white hand in parting, and smiled and bowed when they spoke of the pleasant evening they had passed. But, though conscious that her husband had his eyes on her face, and was waiting for the further words that should assure his friends of a future welcome to their home, they were not spoken.

"You're very hospitable, Neta," said Edna, as the two returned to the sitting-room. "You and papa are something alike. He nearly knocked one of our friends down, in his haste to leave the dining-room. Brother Robert must be fond of them to go out such a night. Are you going to sit up? I wouldn't. Leave the light burning in the hall, and come upstairs. You will not? Well, good-night."

Pausing a moment before leaving the room, she added soberly, "Really though, Neta, I wouldn't let him keep this up, if I were you."

"Keep what up?" asked her sister, somewhat angrily.

"Oh, you know what I mean. Hob-nobbing with our convivial friends."

When Edna left her, Janet drew an easy-chair close to the fire, and putting her slippered feet on the fender began to think. How still was the room, and how preternaturally loud sounded the ticking of the little French clock on the mantel.

This was the first time that Robert had left her in the evening, and she glanced around the room with a shiver of loneliness. He had said he would return by eleven—but it had already struck. She listened intently.

What an unpleasant evening it had been. She would tell Robert truthfully, when he came home, just how

his friends had impressed her. Assuredly they were not the kind of men that she desired for his associates. He would see it, too, when she explained it to him. She rested her head against the chair, and her eyes closed wearily. She wondered how she could be sleepy when she was so anxious. The wood in the grate burned slowly away, the minutes passed, and she fell asleep. A gust of cold air blowing in her face aroused her. With a start, she suddenly sat up. Where was she? Her arms and hands ached from their cramped position. The lamp on the table was growing dim—the fire was also low. The room was really cold. Glancing at the clock, she saw that it was past midnight. Where was Robert? Rising hastily, she went out in the hall. The front door, partly ajar, accounted for the cold air. Could he have come in? Pushing aside the curtains, she entered the billiard-room. Here it was quite dark, but the sound of heavy breathing instantly arrested her attention and she felt her way to the couch that stood close by the window. Trembling violently, she found a match and struck a light. Across the back of a chair was her husband's great coat. His hat was on the floor and he himself stretched out on the sofa.

"Robert! Robert!" She shook him gently. His face was buried in the sofa pillow. He turned his head, but did not open his eyes. Dropping down upon her knees, she said aloud: "My darling, oh, my darling! I knew it! I felt it!" Putting her arm around his neck, she fell to kissing his closed lids, his lips, his hair, and then a numbness crept over her. Rising from her knees, she went softly out to the hall, and bolted the door. Creeping back to the room, she mechanically picked up his hat, and laid it on the chair

with his coat. She looked almost unearthly, standing so motionless in the dim light, the whiteness of her face enhanced by her black dress and her eyes fixedly watching the sleeping figure before her. Once more she bent down, and spoke his name.

"Robert—darling—come upstairs. I won't say anything to-night. We won't talk to-night," she said, pitiously.

His lips moved, but no sound came. Returning to the sitting-room, she found an afghan, and wrapped it tenderly about him. "It's so cold," she said, half aloud, "so cold;" and then she stole noiselessly upstairs. "I'll wait for him here," she thought, as, after lighting the lamp and leaving the door partially open, she sank down by the window. Was that snow—that white haze? Yes, some fell against the glass. How glad she was that Robert was home. "Was she dreaming?" she wondered. "Why could she not think clearly? And oh, why had she gone to sleep?" She rose at length, and prepared for bed. Two o'clock. "When would he waken?" It seemed to her hours that she lay, her eyes wide open and her ears strained to catch the slightest sound, before she became aware of a noise in the hall below. Her heart began to beat, as she closed her eyes and waited. She felt, rather than heard him approach the bedside.

"Are you awake, Neta?" he said, in a low tone. "I fell asleep downstairs," he added, as he turned up the light. "Did you get the afghan for me? Why didn't you call me?"

"I did," she said, briefly.

"What is the matter?"

"Robert, it's very late."

"There's something wrong, Neta. Ah! Well! You'll tell me in the morning. Good-night."

A feeling of passionate anger seized her. How dare he feign this ignorance? She covered her eyes to hide her tears.

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

How suddenly we are often awakened from a dream of perfect happiness, and made to realize that such a condition is well-nigh impossible in this world. A few brief days the soul sings and mocks at fate, and then its iron hand is laid upon us and we are forced to remember our own weakness against the enemy that would destroy our peace.

Neta's first thought on the following morning was that something had happened. With clearer consciousness came the memory of the preceding night. Robert was still asleep. As she rose, she determined that no word should pass her lips till he had spoken. She lingered over her toilet, hoping that he would waken, but he gave no sign, and at length she left the room, and went downstairs. Kitty had started a blazing fire in the billiard room. Robert's coat and hat still lay where she had placed them. A sick feeling filled her heart as she carried the coat and hat to the hall and hung them up. It wanted thirty minutes before breakfast. Going into the sitting-room, she parted the curtains and stood for some time at the window, before Robert entered. Had she obeyed her first impulse, she would have turned and thrown herself into his arms—but pride, that she could not overcome, restrained her.

"You're down early," he said, putting two cold fingers playfully on her cheek.

"Go to the fire, Robert. Your hands are like ice."

"Come with me, then. I have a hazy idea, pet, that we went to sleep last night—well, not very good friends. What did I do, dear? It wasn't much after eleven when I got back. I went into the billiard-room for a smoke and fell asleep on the lounge and woke up stiff and uncomfortable, and—Neta, aren't you going to kiss me? Oh, well, don't, if you think it is too much trouble. Breakfast ready? It is long past the time."

"The bell will ring in five minutes," she said.

Robert pretended to be reading.

Edna's entrance at this moment put an end to the awkwardness. At the table Robert devoted himself to his father-in-law, while Janet scarcely spoke.

"A 'family jar,'" thought Edna, as she buttered her toast. "The first, and therefore, they're both on suicidal thoughts intent. Brother Robert's curtain lecture hasn't agreed with him."

Before the meal was over, Pinto was driven up to the door and Robert rose to go.

"Want anything, Janet?" he inquired, standing at the door and putting on his gloves. "No? Well, I'm off."

As the front door slammed after him, Janet ran into the sitting-room, and peered out of the window at the quickly-disappearing vehicle.

"How could he? How could he?" she cried, while tears blurred the snowy landscape.

Then she went about her morning duties with feverish haste, going over and over again, in her own mind, the words that should greet him when he came back. She would be gentle and patient and he would tell

her how he had come to break his promise ; and then the compact would be renewed and this one failure be forgiven.

She thought of her recent indignation and despair with fast growing wonder that it had been possible for her to entertain such feelings. Infinite love swayed her now. She almost lost sight of his wrong-doing in the face of the stupendous fact of her own repellent coldness and refusal to receive his usual morning caress.

By ten o'clock Edna appeared in the sitting-room, muffled in furs, and to Janet's intense relief, signified her intention of spending the day at the homestead.

"You're out of sorts and I'm not in a very amiable frame of mind myself, so I'll go and tease Aunt Lydia for a while," she said, with a curious questioning glance at the elder woman's face. "By night you'll be happy again, and to be happy, extravagantly happy, one must have spells of midnight gloom. Poor Neta, you've got so much to learn."

Although a creature of impulse in every sense of the word, the girl seldom gave any outward show of feeling for her sister, more than an occasional light kiss and frequent ebullitions of good-natured teasing.

Her words now made Janet smile, in spite of her unhappiness, but the smile quickly faded, as Edna abruptly crossed the room and dropping on her knees beside her sister's chair, took her hand and held it caressingly between her own little gloved palms.

"I know all about it," she began, gently ; "the world's as black as Egypt to you at the present moment, but he's got a heart, oh, ever so much bigger than his head, and it's all yours, head and heart. Don't shed a tear alone. It's a horrible waste. Let him feel every drop.

The remembrance will prop up a million promises. I could cry by the hour, and a man would only think how red I was making my eyes, but you look grieved, and they picture a sorrowing angel. You don't know your power, really, Neta, you don't. You can lead him with a cobweb, if you pull the right way. I know I've often laughed over his being in leading strings, and your strict notions, but I'm ready all the same to push him back if he makes you unhappy. There are very few people in my world who seem to me worth loving. I pass around a tremendous amount of counterfeit affection, I know, that's policy, but you get the biggest share of the genuine sentiment—consequently, I hate to see you fighting, with such miserable earnestness, that which is little more than a mere shadow. People who have ideals are wretched half the time. It will be a moral impossibility for brother Robert to breathe continually in such an exalted atmosphere. Let him come down once in a while and be comfortable. You can watch him and he'll go a great deal higher after these little dips. Penitence and humility are adorable in such men; they mean all manner of promised delights for yourself. Really, Neta, after all, if you could only come to believe it, you are to be envied, for on an average of about three times a year I predict that you'll have some glorious making up scenes. Who minds a tear that's bound to be kissed away? When I marry, I shall manage to have an artistic little quarrel at least once a week to keep me awake and add variety to the tameness of perpetually watching one man."

She raised her lovely, mischievous face and Janet leaned forward and kissed her, saying rather confusedly as Edna rose to go:

"Don't talk to Aunt Lydia about—about Robert. I

don't think he will invite those—friends of his here again. I was not pleased with them. I—I am not as unhappy as you appear to imagine. You do not understand, believe me. I hope you will have a pleasant day. It is rather dull for you over here at times, I fear, but some time you will have your own little home. I'm sure I don't know, dear, where you get your queer ideas of life. You are so young. Everything is yet before you. It is unwise to have opinions, such positive opinions before we are given some opportunity for proving them. We cannot feel with another's feelings or see with another's eyes. When a young girl is cynical, people decide that it is either affectation, or that she has really, thus early, encountered enough disappointments to make her distrustful of her friends. Certainly this last has not happened to you."

"Never," said the girl with a shrug of her shoulders. "I simply echo older cynics on trust. In time I shall prove the fallacy or wisdom of their utterances and then I'll either believe with you, that men are just a little lower than the angels or—something quite different. I fear when that period arrives some, one, poor particular man will be wishing that I had never been born." She smiled and nodded her pretty head to emphasize this prediction, and then in another moment Janet was alone again.

Finding her mending basket, she sat down to sew, but her attention wandered and she kept watching the clock. Six hours must pass before he would come, six hours before she could tell him what was in her heart. Experience had taught her that he did not always grasp her true meaning when she labored to impress him with her thoughts and plans and hopes for their future, but she was unwilling to admit that this was due to any



incapacity on his part. In her own obscure expression of her ideas, she decided, lay the cause. Time and daily companionship would yet teach him to understand her better, and this expectation, built on the marvelous patience and faith which form so large a part of such a woman's love, comforted her in those hours of separation when his words and their import were lovingly reviewed.

She dropped her work at length and pushed the basket from her. The house was very still. She could hear the melting snow drip from the veranda roof. The sweeping branches of the pine trees near the drive were bent low beneath a crushing weight of snow, but the sun would liberate them by noon. She watched them dreamily for some moments, drawing a fanciful analogy between their condition and her own spirits. Both would rise, both were indeed already rising.

Leaning back in her chair with a qualm of conscience because of her idleness, she became suddenly aware that the front door had opened and closed. Concluding that her father had gone out, she rose quickly up to warn him that the veranda steps were very slippery, but she had only reached the opening between the curtains when an attempted exclamation was cut short and she found herself held close by a pair of strong arms while some one was kissing her with unwonted vehemence.

"I had to come back," he said at last, when she had recovered her breath, and stood with beaming eyes watching him remove his mud-bespattered coat. "I hadn't more than three ideas in my head and you began and ended them all," he continued as she did not speak. "But come inside and tell me what I've done, and—and we'll straighten the thing out."

"Yes," she agreed hastily, hardly noting his words, "Yes, it was good of you, dear, to come. Are you chilly? Shall Kitty get you some hot coffee? The sun looks warm but I'm sure the air is cold."

"Well, it's jolly and warm in here. Is Edna off again?"

"Yes." She drew forward his favorite easy-chair as she replied, and once more inquired if there was anything that she could get for him.

His ride in the wind had added several shades of color to his ruddy face. He eyed her wistfully for a moment, then as she still remained standing, he sprang from his chair, placed her forcibly therein and reseated himself on the broad arm.

By turning her head she could see him also, and for some minutes both were silent.

"Well," he asked, finally, "why don't you pitch into me? Why don't you tell me that I made a fool of myself last night; that I forgot my promise to you, and that I'm not worth the powder to blow me up. I know it. I knew it this morning. I tell you, Neta, I'm punished. But don't spare me. Say all you've thought. Don't keep your opinions to yourself, and when you're through I'll get down on the rug there at your feet and adore you and promise again, anything, only speak. You can be as severe as you like; you can tell me that you're sorry you ever married me, and dollars to but-tons, you have been sorry for an hour or so this morning. That's why I came back. I've got to kill that idea if you are entertaining it, otherwise it would make an end of me."

"Robert, oh Robert, you are altogether wrong," she cried, bending closer, "I could never have such a regret. This morning you appeared so indifferent, you

didn't seem to know or care that I was unhappy, but I shouldn't have been so cold to you. I did wrong. I never will again. I will help you. I understand. I—I think I know how you were placed last night. Don't be afraid of me. Oh, my darling, don't think me severe and hard and exacting. I am not. Sometimes I fear you think that I can't sympathize, can't realize the temptations you have to meet, but I do, oh, believe me, I do. If you do not stand firm, however, I know so well what the end will be. I'm not a narrow-minded fanatic. I do not feel called upon to preach temperance to the world. I'm afraid I don't care, as I should care, how many other men use alcohol immoderately. My thought, is for you, only you. Is it strange that I look with terror upon your yielding to a habit that would mean such utter ruin? It is my one trouble, my one fear in the world, and until last night I was so sure, so—almost positive——”

As she faltered, he seized her hand and carried it reverently to his lips. He had listened to her outburst with mingled feelings of contrition and resolve, but whatever tinge of doubt might linger in her mind no trace of any such sentiment could be detected in his calculations.

“If this is your only trouble, sweetheart, it shall go as the snow is going. I grant you if I'd married an ordinary woman, who wasn't very much interested in me, I might have failed, but with you! Great Scott! the thing's impossible. You know what you are to me. One failure don't signify that I'm to be given up——”

“Given up!” she interrupted quickly, “I don't believe I ever could do that. I would always hope.”

“And you shall be given something to build that hope

upon," he returned, with characteristic confidence. "Now, are you happy?"

"Those friends of yours, Robert," she said, not noticing his question, "I—I do not like to sit in judgment upon your friends, but the influence of those men is anything but good. They are both wanting in refinement. How can you like them? Had it not been for them last night you——"

"I know," he finished for her. "Well, they shall not come here again, rest assured of that; though, honestly, pet, it's hardly fair to shift the blame off on them. However, the chances are that I'll see very little of them from this out. Does that satisfy you?"

He searched her face for the longed-for indication that her mind was once more at rest. He could read her expression so well that a thrill of relief filled him when he saw her smile. He felt as jubilant as a school-boy who has escaped an expected punishment, but he was anxious to have her realize his gratitude. He wanted to do something to please her, but he could think of no way to accomplish this, until the notion of suggesting a walk occurred to him. He knew that she loved to walk, and of late, owing to the condition of the roads, they had taken very few together.

Intuitively she understood what had prompted his wish to take her across the town for a glimpse of her beloved sea and she rose at once to prepare for the excursion.

There was an element of almost pitiful eagerness in the effort which he put forth to entertain her, as soon as they had started. Not since the days of their engagement had he appeared so loverlike.

She had very little to say herself, but he talked incessantly. He told her of some changes that he in-

tended to make in the house when the weather would permit, changes unthought of ten minutes before they were described as settled plans. He spoke of a pony that a man in Norwood wanted him to buy and which he imagined might prove to be a first-rate little animal for her to drive.

His desire to make her forget her recent disappointment led him into many extravagances of speech, but this peculiarity no longer surprised her. She had grown accustomed to sifting his boyish volubility and thereby getting at the few practical ideas underlying his airy dream castles; ideas that might come within his power and inclination to act upon, when his exalted flow of spirits should subside. Such bursts of enthusiasm were entirely foreign to her own nature, but they were a part of him, and he never wearied her.

The sunlight quivered and danced far across the white crested swells of the sea. The wind blew keen in their faces, but when they at length turned their steps homeward with pleasant anticipations of luncheon, the cloud in her sky had almost disappeared.

Snow in February is often a fleeting substance. In the opinion of the weather-wise, this storm was winter's death warrant, for a very mellow and springlike sun soon began to show his face and March drew near in a blaze of sunshine.

Chancing to run in upon Milly one afternoon some ten days later, Edna perceived that her friend's face wore quite a new expression. The worried, puzzled look which, since the holidays, had so frequently shone in her eyes, had vanished. Indeed she was unusually animated and bore Edna off to her own room at once.

"It's unnecessary for you to say a word," began her

visitor dropping into a little white rocker and swinging aside her cape. "He's coming home and the day is set. Your countenance is a speaking one."

This greeting, however, only evoked a merry laugh which leaped from a heart so happy that amusement could be derived from very trivial suggestions.

Edna's manner no longer surprised Milly. She had months before abandoned the thought of ever getting at the meaning of many of Edna's queer speeches, consequently it was her habit now to accept their ambiguity in silence, deciding that much was nonsense, pure and simple, while the morsels of truth, in between, were too obtusely presented for her to comprehend.

"Yes," she said, with reddening cheeks, "he is coming. I had a long letter last night. Wait, I'll get it."

"Get it!" cried Edna, as Milly crossed the room to her desk. "My dear child, I can't permit you to show anything so sacred. I wouldn't read a line of it for worlds. He didn't intend that I should."

"Yes, he did," persisted her friend, diving into the drawer where such treasures were kept; "at least part of it. There's a message in it for you."

"A message for me?" Edna opened her eyes, and tipping forward in her chair, regarded Milly with an expression of mock surprise.

"Yes, but I wish you'd read it all. It's beautifully written. I never knew him to write so well before. It frightened me a little when I first read it. He speaks so solemnly of—of our marriage, and of the great responsibility he assumes. Really, Edna, it isn't a love letter. I mean there's nothing foolish in it. I'm sure you never heard him talk as he writes here, about—about life and duty. I'd like you to see that he can be serious. I want

you to know what a solemn thing he thinks it is to get married." Moving her chair over to Edna's side, she held out the letter, but her companion, tilting back in her rocker, stubbornly shook her head.

"I'll take your word for it," she said, hastily. "I don't doubt but that it's a marvel. I know the style. After sundry very laudable assertions of his own great unworthiness and your exalted goodness, he grows less worm-like, takes on a few attributes of proud manhood, protests that his one purpose in life shall be to crown your days with unalloyed joy, etc., etc. They are all alike, you innocent little goose. There hasn't been an original love letter written since the days of Adam."

Milly was silent for a moment, then twisting the envelope nervously in her fingers, she plunged into a subject which had cost her many hours of perplexed thought.

"I wish, oh, Edna, I wish you wouldn't always make fun of Laurie. I can't understand it. Perhaps he didn't like you so very much when you first came home from school, but he would now if you'd let him. I'm sure he would. In the fall when he tried to be nice to you, you wouldn't meet him half-way. Oh, I noticed it often. It will be dreadful by and by when we are married, because I shall want you to come and see me often, and oh, Edna, don't you think, if you tried, things could be different?"

As she ceased speaking, she scarcely dared look up lest she should catch sight of a certain well-known twinkle in those blue eyes opposite, but Edna's next move dispelled this fear and strengthened, with one of those quick flashes of involuntary trust, the tie of love between them.

"Try?" echoed her friend, softly, slipping down to a

favorite seat on the big soft rug before the fireplace, and leaning her face against Milly's knee, "I'd do a great deal to please you, dear. I'll be different, Milly. Things shall all be different, oh, so different. Don't fret about—about my not liking him. I do like him of course. We won't disagree any more, but really, my disagreements don't signify anything. I disagree with you! I'm perfectly horrid to you often, but I'm fond of you all the same. As for him, he's been pelted with roses all his life by everybody. I just wanted him to feel the thorny stems a little; but I won't any more. Now read me the message, then I'm going home before I tease you again."

Her face was wistfully serious, and no one could ever withstand her when she was in this mood. In spite of herself Milly felt her eyes fill. An intangible impression that for one brief instant a look of childish terror had swept across the face uplifted to her own, flooded her tender heart with wondering pity; but she was silent, and in another moment Edna returned to her chair, and there was nothing to do but hunt through the pages of Laurie's letter for the promised message.

"It isn't long," she said at last, and beginning abruptly, read in a low tone the following lines—

"I presume you see Edna often. Tell her that I fully agree with her regarding yourself. Tell her that I realize the full length and breadth of the duty I am going to assume, also assure her that she may yet be given an occasion to acknowledge her judgment of me in error. Meanwhile give her my best wishes and extend for me the hope that her life may be as joyous as mine promises to be."

Dropping the sheet, she found that Edna was watch-



ing her with eyes that sparkled with amusement or anger, it was difficult to tell which.

"Is that all?"

"Yes," said Milly, half apologetically, eyeing her friend as the latter suddenly rose and silently put on her cape. "But I'm sure he means it, Edna, his—his good wishes," she concluded, timidly.

"Undoubtedly," was the other's quick retort. "If the rest of the letter echoes sentiments so palpably sincere, and—and transparent, I don't wonder you were struck with their beauty. Really, Milly, after all, it isn't strange that you adore him. A heart so big with generosity is bound to overflow and take in even impertinent friends. When is he coming?"

"Tuesday, I expect him."

"And the all-eventful day?"

"That isn't set yet, but I think by the first of April."

"Will he stay here till then?"

"Stay here? Yes, why? I know, Edna, you've thought it queer because he hasn't been home this winter, but I understood, at least I—I tried not to get lonely and impatient. You know he can work better in New York. He likes his studio better there. The—the atmosphere is better, he says. I've realized how that might be." She left her chair as she spoke.

"The atmosphere? Oh," said Edna with a comical uplifting of her brows, then with one of her startling changes of manner, she suddenly drew closer and impulsively threw her arms around Milly's neck. "I'm glad he's coming," she whispered, "glad the time is so near. You've been an angel to him. We'll all make you happy. You *shall* be happy. I want you to be, dear. I want you to be."

When she had gone, Milly thought of these words. They recurred to her over and over again, bringing with each remembrance, a tide of silent resolutions to be worthy of her friend's love.

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## CHAPTER XIX.

LAURIE CAMERON'S elaborate preparations for his future took on a most sombre aspect, when he found himself once more at home, and the decisive moment, when dreaming must cease, and action begin, confronted him.

Everything tended to lower his spirits. The Captain was in a rabid temper at dinner. Miss Randle simpered incessantly. Questions, to account for his season's absence, were literally hurled at him, until his patience gave way, and his replies became forcible if not satisfying.

A strong wind was blowing in from the sea when he started for Miss Penelope's. It cut his face with its salty breath, and made him turn up his collar and thrust his hands deep down in his overcoat pockets, while he promised himself short tastes of these discomforts in the days to come.

Plunging along the old familiar path through the darkness of the woods, his thoughts reverted to the past, rather than the coming interview with Milly. He knew just how she would look. Just what she would say. Any wound that her feelings might have received because of the months which he had elected to spend away from her, could be dispelled with a single kiss. He realized that her love for him was deep and

true, but its very tranquillity had often led him to argue that were it left without sustenance, time could lead it into forgetfulness. "If love lives on hope, it dies with it. It is a fire that goes out from want of fuel." He bit his lip as these words recurred to him. He had sent the quotation to Edna Morvick six weeks before. He had built around it a masterly argument, with the inevitable death of Milly's love for him, under certain conditions. He had laid bare his very soul, begging her to weigh the situation well and save them all. He had never, in the course of his experience, supplicated any human being with like intensity. He had felt that she must yield, must put aside her mockery and defiance, and show him her true self, but his attempt had failed utterly.

In his pocket, at the present moment, he carried her answer. An answer full of scorn and derision. A perfect blaze of indignation against him, because of his daring to assume that she really entertained a regard for him, warmer than any he had hitherto been able to tempt her into displaying. She had goaded and stung him with bitter invectives, lamenting his want of honor and predicting nothing but wretchedness for one so heartlessly cruel.

He could repeat it from beginning to end. Snatches of it echoed and re-echoed in his ears with maddening persistency. It was as though he had heard her speak the lines and the memory of her voice was an added torture.

For the first time in his thoughtless life he had been made aware of another's contempt for him. Women particularly had never repulsed him, and the idea that this crude little country girl, just out of school, should possess the power of hurting him so sorely, had been

difficult for him to calmly accept. Of course he hated her now. He had hated her for some weeks, but he prided himself on the fact that the violent change in his sentiments had not led him into doing anything rash. He had conquered his mad impulse to go to her and make her retract what she had written. He had not even replied to her letter.

Following the dead level to which his spirits had naturally sunk after his excitement, had succeeded a period of dull indifference, that continued until a life with Milly had gradually begun to appeal to him again, more strongly than it had done, even in the early days of his courtship.

The remembrance that one woman at least loved him devotedly, accompanied by the realization that in all honor he owed this woman instant atonement, had at length given birth to a resolve and he had deliberately mapped out his intentions, in an effusive letter addressed to the girl, who was waiting so patiently for him at home.

He had been in a most exalted frame of mind that night and his pen had moved with great facility. It pleased him to imagine the dignity and firmness which he would show in the event of a meeting with Edna. He had longed to have her understand his new attitude, and with this end in view, had tucked in his ambiguous message, which he felt she would rightly interpret.

Now, however, a second reaction was slowly creeping over him and turning the fire of his commendable purpose into a weak and maddening wish to escape from the path of duty. The pathetic pictures which he had drawn of Milly's delight over his return, palled upon him and he drew near the big house that held her, full of inward contention.

She was waiting for him, crouching on the last step of the stairs in order to hear the first sound of his approach; and yet when her trembling fingers opened the door and he stood before her, no words rose to her lips, though her eyes grew luminous.

To his surprise, the hours which ensued were unmistakably soothing in their effect. When Miss Penelope considerably withdrew and left them in possession of the cheery room with its pile of blazing logs on the hearth bidding defiance to the wind, he discovered that the situation was quite to his liking. Milly's small form engulfed in an arm-chair was certainly pleasant to look at, and he did look at her very critically to-night. She had never come so near belonging to him before, and he desired to take a dispassionate view of his property.

It was gratifying to realize that there was nothing uncertain about her. He assured himself that he was willing to endure a certain amount of monotony in their intercourse, for the sake of this immunity from surprise. Her docility was also like balm to his wounded vanity. On the whole, he almost enjoyed playing the fond lover and was mildly astonished at the warmth of his feeling.

She asked very few questions and gave no sign of having grieved over his absence or the extraordinary intervals that had elapsed between his letters, but there was no misunderstanding her only too evident joy upon having him with her again.

"Well," he said, finally, reaching for her hand and holding it in a gentle, tender way peculiar to him, "you had no time to answer my last letter. What is the verdict? Am I going to be made happy at the date I suggested? You don't want to wait any longer. There's no reason for waiting."

"No, there's no reason," she returned, shyly. "April is close upon us, but I can be ready." He bent suddenly and kissed her.

"There's no nonsense about you, Milly, for which the gods be praised. You always know what you can do and when you can do it. You're sure of yourself, and your very self-poise sets others on their feet. A vacillating woman would turn my brain." He spoke with marked irritation, and she looked at him for an instant with a quiver of alarm.

"Oh, Laurie, I know you've worked too hard. I was afraid you would. Your face shows it. You will rest now, won't you, before—before April. You must not mind if it is dull; dullness will be good for you. You will stay here a great deal, won't you? Aunt Penelope won't bother you, and Neal is most always in his room. You can smoke, and lounge, and read, and not even think of painting. You must not think of me. I mean you mustn't think that I shall expect you to—to be always attentive and sit with me, as you are now. I understand that you would not want to all the time, but if you stay home I'm afraid you will work."

"I've no wish to stay home," he said, with a laugh. "Undoubtedly you'll see me morning, noon and night."

She smiled contentedly. "I certainly hope so. I gave Edna your message," she added, abruptly.

He started perceptibly, as, with an effect of carelessness so strained that even she could detect the hidden interest, he inquired,

"What did she say?"

"Not much; but I am sure she was pleased. She seemed surprised at first, then I think she laughed; but she always laughs, you know."

"Yes, I know," he repeated, "she always laughs;

but if I remember rightly, I had no intention of being funny on this occasion."

"Oh, it wasn't that, but, Laurie, I honestly believe she likes you. I do so hope you will be good friends. Why, at first I did not care for her. She said such astonishing things, but she can be different, oh, so different. I wish you could see her sometimes. No one could help loving her. I don't wonder men love her."

"Men love her? Oh, they do? Who pray?"

"A number," said Milly, dreamily. "She has been out a great deal this winter and I don't know how many different ones go to see her."

"Yes? Do you happen to know which one of these village boys is preferred?"

As he put this question, he appeared bent upon understanding the intricacies of Miss Penelope's draped lamp that stood on the table near which he had been sitting. He turned up the wick, shedding a deeper radiance over Milly's brown head, reposing close to the glare, then he plunged the place in gloom; the happy medium at length attained, he looked down on his companion and repeated his inquiry.

"Edna is not in the least confidential," declared Milly, "but I think there is a gentleman in Norwood who comes nearest to pleasing her, a Mr. Mainwaring. His father is a lawyer and he's one too. They are a very old family and well off, I believe, but he's frightfully homely. Edna always laughs about him, but I think she really likes him and he worships her; but perhaps you know him?"

"No. I've heard of the family. Where did she meet him?"

"A cousin of his went to school with her, but no

one can tell whether she will ever marry him or not, she never talks of her affairs, that's one reason why I like her. It would not seem kind if she were disposed to tell me all about her—her friends, for me not to do the same, and I couldn't. I couldn't tell any one about you. I mean about our——”

“I know,” he interposed, “ten chances to one she wouldn't let you if you tried.”

“Oh,” began Milly, fearing that he would ascribe this disinclination on her friend's part to a want of friendly feeling where he was concerned, “of course she knows how much I care and how good you are. I tell her that. I've always told her that. I didn't mean that I never speak of you. She talks of you herself, often.”

As this assertion met with no response, she changed the subject and began her usual struggle to be bright and entertain him. Why was it that she could never think of anything diverting to say? She was not afraid of him now. A better acquaintance had destroyed her original idea of the depth of his superior wisdom. Aside from Art, she knew herself to be almost as well posted as he, and yet, there seemed to be very little to talk about when the time for general conversation came round. For her own part, she was willing to sit silent for hours, if she could be close to him, with her hand in his, or her head on his shoulder, but she was wise enough, with all her innocence, to realize that he would exact more than this and she was feverishly anxious to give these evenings, these heavenly evenings, some spice of variety for his sake.

In the past it had been his habit to meet her endeavors half-way, but to-night he could not bring himself to make the slightest exertion. Accordingly



the minutes flew by, bringing nearer and nearer the dread hour when he would rise and leave her and nothing was settled between them, about the day so rapidly approaching. Twice, three times she essayed to advance a leading question, and then retreated with a shy glance at his handsome, moody face.

Probably he was aware of her furtive examination, for he made her come and sit beside him, where he could stroke her pretty hair and see her color come and go under his touch.

He knew what she was waiting for him to say and he said it at last, with much impressment. Indeed it was much easier than he had at one time imagined it would be, to go into these details of the wedding and their trip. He began to talk of both events with sensations of pleasurable expectancy, and remained long past the hour that Miss Penelope considered proper for him to depart.

Milly's manner was certainly perfect, he decided, as he finally took himself off. What a fool he would have been to throw away such a chance, for a mere hope. Miserable he had undoubtedly been, but his misery had been balanced by reason. He had held on to his bird in the hand, even if he had made a wild dash for the more desirable bird in the bush. He smiled grimly at the conceit.

Though the wind still blew, the moon had risen since his trip over earlier in the evening, and he found the path flooded with light. A stab of the unpleasant disturbed him, as he caught sight of the Feltons' cottage. He had heard of Kathie's strange disappearance. He had wondered more than once as to where she could be, but he comfortably absolved himself from all blame for her action. Her love, he considered, had been too

fierce to last. It was bound to either burn itself away, or merge into new life for another.

Involuntarily he quickened his steps, as he drew near the house. A light shone from one of the lower windows. He saw a female form rise and hurriedly cross the room and his heart leaped as the door opened and this same figure strode down the path in his direction. For a brief instant he thought it was Kathie, but a nearer view showed him his mistake. One of Kathie's shawls was twisted about her head and partially shaded a face stamped with the marks of dissipation. Her step was firm enough now, however, and as it was her evident intention to speak with him, he paused, and she hastened forward.

"I knew ye," she called. "Bless yer dear heart, Mr. Laurie, I knew ye. Ezra, he's been watching for ye this hour past. 'Keep yer eyes open, my boy,' I says, 'I want to see him when he comes by.' With yer leave I'll walk a bit with ye. I'm that worried, Mr. Laurie, about Kate. The boy's gone clean daft. Not a line nor a word; now where is she?" As she made this appeal she turned and eyed him suspiciously, unmindful of his amazement, which changed rapidly to indignation as he replied,

"I have heard that she is away, but I certainly can give you no information of her whereabouts. You are on the wrong track."

"True now," she whimpered, keeping up with him as he started to walk on. "Yer wouldn't tell me a lie, would ye, her own mother, and one as has known ye since ye was born! I thought, mayhaps, I thought——"

"Never mind what you thought," he interrupted, angrily. "I've no interest in hearing. 'Pon my soul, no one can blame the girl. You don't make her home

very dear to her, but she'll come back. Here, console yourself with this," and he handed her some loose silver.

Not waiting to listen to her mumbled words of thanks he left her gazing after him, and disappeared in the shade of the woods.

"The old hag," he muttered, savagely. "Are others putting that charming construction on Katie's escapade? I never looked at it in that light before."

Milly was not the only one to be moved by Laurie's presence among them again. Edna sought her own room very early that night, but long hours wore away before she slept.

Throwing herself on the bed, she bolstered up the pillows and lay with locked fingers watching the clock. Ten, half-past ten; he would probably go at half-past ten, she thought. Milly would go with him to the door. She would stand close to the little onyx table at the hall window. The light would show her face there and he would see her eyes. At this juncture he would kiss her, more than once, of course. He would stand in the light then and Milly would think him handsomer than ever. Probably, if they felt sure that Neal would not appear inadvertently, he would take her in his arms at the last moment. She could almost see Milly creep up stairs after the door closed. She would go in dutifully and kiss Miss Penelope good-night, with his kiss warm on her lips, then, once in her own room, she would proceed to sleep, in the most regular manner. She would doubtless pray for him with special earnestness and when oblivion did steal over her, it would leave her sweet face full of happy content.

Slowly the minutes dragged by. At eleven o'clock she sprang from the bed and turned up the light that

was growing dimmer, but her effort was in vain ; the oil was exhausted. Peering into the mirror, she caught a faint outline of her face and laughed mockingly.

"Shadowy, like his conscience," she whispered half aloud. "Milly is asleep. Why don't I go to sleep? What horrible fancies come to one at night. His letter! Oh, Kitty! you miserable Kitty! No oil in my lamp and I want to read it again." Feeling her way across the room, she raised the shade with boisterous haste, and drawing aside the curtains impetuously, the moonlight entered. At the bottom of her untidy desk, hidden under scraps of paper, she finally found what she sought. Sinking into a low chair by the window, she held the envelope dreamily in her fingers.

"What do I want with it? I know it all. I wonder if he don't wish he had it back? I wonder if he isn't afraid?" She placed the paper on the window sill and leaned her face against it. "I wish I could forget that he was engaged to Milly when he wrote it. It was so cowardly, so like a man to run away and—and write. I suppose if I had consented, he would have wanted me to meet him in New York. I know he wouldn't have faced her. Yes, he is certainly a coward." She raised her eyes and looked out through the branches of the trees to the long stretch of lonely road beyond. "I'm glad I wrote what I did; oh, Milly, I am glad. Every minute since, I've been glad. People cry when they are glad, and these are tears of joy, because I didn't help him break your heart."

During the months that she had been a member of the Cameron family, Janet had conscientiously tried to like and show proper respect for her husband's people, but with the exception of Miss Penelope's household,

she had not been altogether successful. Indeed Robert himself had not sought to foster her very slight acquaintance with the Captain and Miss Randle, while Laurie, since their settlement in their own house, had only been conspicuous by his absence.

If the question had been put directly, she would have acknowledged that she had no particular admiration for her brother-in-law. He was a man who could never have attracted her under any circumstances, but she liked to watch him, liked to hear him talk, because, at times, his manner was strikingly like Robert's. Accordingly, when Kitty announced him one afternoon, some three or four days after his return, she rose to meet him with a smile of genuine welcome.

"I know Rob isn't home," he said, shaking hands, "but I hoped to be fortunate enough to find some one in. How are you?"

"Very well," she returned, quietly, "and very glad to see you. I heard that you had come back. I am sorry that Edna is not at home. She went to Norwood this afternoon on the train, but she will be here by dinner-time. You will stay and dine with us?"

"I can't; thanks. Milly expects me there. Well, what do you think of the country in winter? Just as much pleased with the place?"

"Quite as much. We are not very festive, at least Robert and I are not. Edna has found the trip to the village a little objectionable in bad weather, but it has been a pleasant winter for her and for us."

"She is well, I suppose," he suggested, taking a basket of photographs from a table at his right and carelessly running through them. Suddenly his fingers tightened their hold.

"That is a new one that has just been taken," said

Janet, going over to his side. "She belongs to a dramatic club in Norwood. You can see it is taken in costume."

"Yes, Milly wrote to me about it," he managed to say, with a show of indifference, as he hastily replaced the picture, but the sight of that bewitching face had sent the hot blood to his head.

It would be difficult to explain the rather complicated course of reasoning which had resulted in this call. A vague sense that he had planned to meet her thus early in order to establish at once, a basis for their subsequent treatment of each other in private and before the world, still moved him, though the wisdom of his action was already beginning to grow less clearly defined.

The dinner hour at Miss Penelope's was half-past six, sharp, nevertheless he waited until it wanted but a few minutes of that time before he took his leave.

"Perhaps you will meet Edna on the way," his sister-in-law called after him, from the open door and this possibility made him abruptly slacken his speed, and caused him to saunter along the deserted road with a gaze painfully alert.

The mud was drying very rapidly and close to the edge of the narrow walk, spots of green were sprouting. After passing the boundary of his brother's property, not a house was visible for a full quarter of a mile.

"A nice place for her to wander alone at this hour," he mused. "I wonder that Rob isn't sick of his bargain."

The twilight was deepening. Ahead he could see the street that led directly to the village. He drew in his breath quickly as a figure turned the corner and advanced briskly towards him. It was Edna. He would

know that walk among a thousand. On she came, carrying her small head with proud indifference to the loneliness of her surroundings, one hand clutching the skirt of her gown and the other holding her purse. Not, however, until she was within ten yards of him did she betray the slightest sign of having noted his proximity. Then she dropped her skirt and he heard her laugh.

"I thought you were Jerry Flynn, the milkman," she said, extending her hand, which he immediately seized, with the ardent wish that he were Jerry Flynn, or anyone else on God's earth but himself. "Jerry is very nice and Irish and ugly. You've been to the house?"

"Yes," he said, still facing her, "but I should not have gone had I known that you were in Norwood."

"Oh, then you went to see me?"

"I went to see you."

"That was certainly very nice of you, Laurie, considering all things."

"Considering what things?"

"Well, for instance, the fact that you know, I don't approve of you."

"I'm going to make you approve of me," he began, hotly, his calculations taking wings, "I'm going to make you take back what you wrote. I must. I can't stand it. I can't——" She touched him softly on the arm. He had turned and they were walking side by side.

"My dear boy, we are on a public highway. I never get excited on the street. Don't make me wish you had been Jerry."

"No," he said, more humbly, "but I'd give my soul to know what you do think, what you do feel. I may have been weak. I may have sought Milly in the beginning, for—well—for financial reasons, but good God!

I'm not as black as you painted me in that letter. I never did you any harm but to love you. I couldn't help that. I can't help it now, and I'll never be able to help it till I die."

"Oh, yes, you will," she said, soothingly, though her little gloved fingers were clinched tightly together, and her heart was beating so loudly, that she feared he must hear it. "Men always get over those things, really. Perhaps I was severe, but it won't hurt you in the end, and you've had a taste of my temper. I—I don't want to argue now, because I'm tired and—and I have not seen you for months. I adore Milly and am willing to put up with a good many eccentricities from Milly's lover, but—but not when we are alone. Don't let's ever see each other alone, Laurie, please. I—I don't like it."

"Take off that veil, will you?" he said, irrelevantly. "I want to see your face, your eyes, without those horrible dancing dots."

"Is there anything else you would like?"

"Yes," with increasing bitterness, "I would like to kill you; men always want to kill such women as you."

"Do they? I think you're wrong. The men I know would far rather that I lived." He wheeled about sharply. His tone was pleading as he asked:

"But there is no one, Edna, no particular one? I couldn't stand that."

"Oh, no, certainly not. You have some one to love you, some one to live for you, breathe for you, but I must have no one. Oh, the length and depth of masculine selfishness! You great foolish boy, I could have a—a lover to-morrow, if I wanted one—the right kind of a one. The thought of you wouldn't be a feather in my path."



"You can have one now," he whispered, but she recoiled hastily as she went on, with childish impatience,

"Oh, it's no use to talk with you. I wish you'd get married to-morrow—I wish—I wish you would never come back here."

Having reached the gate, they paused, and he compelled her to meet his gaze.

"If I try to remember, you won't stay away from the house because I'm home? Milly would wonder. It's a wretched business all through. I feel like a knave, but it's your fault. You could prevent this crime and you won't. You drive me to desperation, you——"

"Wait," she interposed, "I have a plan. Get a nice, long, sharp knife—that Italian dagger of Neal's will do—then get Milly to come over here some night, see how lonely and weird and still it is, then we, you and I, will cut—cut her lovely white throat, deep, deep and sure, and then we'll be happy, oh, gloriously happy, for—five minutes. At the end of that time, I would stab you with the same knife, and—and hate you." She laughed hysterically, and he shuddered at the suggestion. Like a flash, her mood changed. A frightened look crept into her beautiful eyes. Again she touched his arm, and piteously urged him to go. "You were bound to—to be foolish once," she said, brokenly, "but after this, Laurie, you must remember. I don't love many people, but I do love her and I want to help you make her happy. We can," she continued with sudden eagerness. "It won't be hard—she is not exacting. By-and-by you will thank me, yes, you will. In another moment brother Robert will be here. Good-night."

"You have promised to come over just the same,"

he said, huskily. She nodded her head. There was a lump in her throat which threatened to choke her. He went a step nearer. He scanned her face hungrily, desperately, as though he were looking upon it for the last time in life. "You are sure you don't care, you never could care?"

"Never, never. Why won't you believe me?"

There was a strange ring in her voice which he did not understand; but the gathering darkness hid her expression and he at last left her to find her way up to the door alone.

It was her custom to spend a few minutes every evening with her father in his room. To-night she lingered. Her heart was craving for sympathy. She dreaded the thought of being alone. She did not want to think. It comforted her to have him pet her and call her by the endearing names which he had used when she was a little girl. She told him that her head ached and she wanted him to hold her and forget that she was grown up. There was no need for concealment here. His eyes could not search out and question the misery in her face. From her childhood, tears and laughter had always mingled freely, therefore it gave him no surprise now to feel her wet cheek against his own, but the discovery doubled the force of his customary tenderness and kept him wakeful for a long time after she had gone to her room.

On the succeeding morning a typical March rain-storm set in and continued with unabated fury for two days. A narrow thread of blue sky chancing to show itself at the expiration of the second afternoon, Edna donned a waterproof and went over to Milly's, only to find that she had driven to Norwood with Laurie.

The assurance that they were likely to return at any

moment could not, however, induce her to wait. She did not want to talk with Miss Penelope, but after she had left that cheery little woman she wished herself back. She wished she had thought of invading Neal's sanctum. Anything was preferable to going home and sitting in the billiard-room window, watching the old twisted cherry-tree outside with its trickling sticky gum and its hideous shape.

Her gaze wandered forlornly down the long, quiet street. A block further on would take her to the lane which ran through the woods surrounding Randlemeade. She had a friend living beyond these woods, a quiet sensible girl, with whom she had spent many hours during the winter. Cora would be delightful to-day, because she never asked questions.

Turning about resolutely, she started past Miss Penelope's once more, with no thought of the lowering sky, or the absurdity of her appearance. A soft felt cap of Robert's was too expansive for her small head, and half concealed the tops of her ears. It had flattened and pushed down her hair, until it curled above the brim, in sunny little tendrils. Her hands were bare and growing stiff and red with the cold.

She found the trip through the woods very unpleasant. It was not raining but the water still dripped from the trees and the black earth was sodden and springy under her feet.

Some people are singularly deficient in their ability to properly appreciate the flight of time and Edna was one of these, but as she never troubled herself to order her actions to suit the convenience of others, it caused her no regret to find, an hour or so later, that she had prolonged her call beyond the possibility of getting home in time for dinner,

It was growing dark when she turned into the woods on her way back, and it became a difficult matter to keep to the path, but she did not quicken her steps. It gave her a certain morbid pleasure to contrast Milly's present surroundings with her own gloomy environment. She was almost glad when she felt it beginning to rain. She had a hazy feeling that some one would be to blame if she got wet. A wetting might bring on a cold and a cold might mean death, in the event of which, of course, the wedding would have to be postponed. She drew a realistic picture of his behavior on the occasion of her funeral, and the words, "mine in death," echoed dismally in her thoughts, until she found it necessary, to either dry her eyes or tumble headlong in the brambles and undergrowth, that retarded her progress.

She did not remember ever having heard it rain in the woods before. How frightful sounded the swaying of the great bare branches above her head. She could fancy that they were long, cold, wet, living arms, sweeping down to clasp her in a deadly embrace. She shivered and stopped to adjust her loose overshoe and when she looked up, a man's form confronted her.

"Where in the name of Heaven have you been?"

"Oh, Laurie, is it you? Isn't this a horrid place. You can't hear a sound behind you. I've been—I've been over to Cora Hilton's."

"You have, and where's your umbrella?"

"I didn't take any. It wasn't raining this afternoon."

"Come," he said, authoritatively, "we're only a step from the house. You can't go on like this. Here, for Heaven's sake get under this. I'll get you something dry."

"Where?" she asked stupidly, looking up at him.

"At the house. No one need see you. We can go in the studio door. There's a glorious fire there. I've just left it. Come for a few minutes. I'll take you home then."

"I won't have to see any one?"

"No," he said, seizing her by the arm and hurrying her quickly along the path, trembling meanwhile, lest she might suddenly wrench herself away and insist upon returning home at once. "They won't be worried about you," he continued, fearing this would be her next objection; "they'll think you are with Milly."

"Yes," she said, in the same dreamy tone as though he were forcing her to do something against which she was powerless to resist. "Yes, they will think I am with Milly."

He was silent for a moment, but she could feel his hold on her arm tightening and a wave of the old rebellion surged over her.

"I'm not a naughty child being taken home to be whipped. You hurt me."

"Hurt you?" His fingers relaxed their pressure a little, but he kept her close at his side, until they stood within the shadow of the house.

Seeking and quickly applying his key, he ushered her through the small door into the room illuminated only by the blazing logs in the wide, blackened chimney. She drew a sharp breath of pleasure, as he deftly lighted one of the beautiful jewelled globes, suspended from the now darkened sky-light overhead, and then, divested of her waterproof, she sank into a corner of the broad divan drawn near enough to catch the direct warmth of the fire. She watched him spread out her cloak to dry, sitting with her hands folded, and

a huge crimson pillow under her elbow, a picture of perfect content.

He took in the position, he noted every insignificant detail, from her dishevelled hair, to the muddy little boot reposing so serenely on a stool upholstered with one of his rarest bits of Eastern embroidery, and yet he appeared to scarcely look at her, so fearful was he of dispelling this unexpected and marvellous exhibition of good nature.

"See," he remarked encouragingly, "they'll dry that way in no time and then I'll go with you. You—don't mind being here? You never were here before at night."

"No, never," she admitted, slowly, "and I haven't a very clear idea how I happen to be here now, but I am."

This last assertion being indisputable, he continued to watch her, until a sudden assumption of boldness caused him to seat himself by her side.

"I am full of gratitude," he said, when the silence had become oppressive. "I did not look for this. I did not believe I should ever receive a word of kindness from your lips, and it's worth—Heavens, you don't know what it's worth to me. Edna—think—out of a lifetime, a long life, give me just one hour. Let me tell you all that I would do. Let me tell you how I would love you, worship you. Listen, it must mean something to you. You must feel. Your eyes, your face, tell me so. Think what you are bidding me do. Think of the sin of marrying her, when every heartbeat is yours; the madness of it, oh, my darling, listen. It isn't too late. You haven't known your own heart perhaps. You have put me away, because you wanted to be true to her, but we can't be true to others and

untrue to ourselves. Will nothing move you to pity, nothing?"

She looked at him supplicatingly.

"You said you wouldn't. You said you wouldn't!" she repeated in a frightened whisper.

"Yes, yes, I know I did," he continued, quick to follow up the advantage which he fancied he had gained, "but your commands were unreasonable. Indeed, there isn't a grain of reason in the whole thing. In a little time she—she would forget. We wouldn't stay here. I'd never bring you here. I know how you would feel——"

"No, you don't," she retorted, roused to childish anger. "You don't know anything about me. Suppose—suppose I did consent. What would become of us? How would we live? Remember you wouldn't get any money with me. Your life wouldn't be an easy one. You'd have to work. I'm not a nice person to live with if I can't have what I want, and I usually happen to—to want a great deal."

"You don't alarm me," he returned, softly, "I would work for you."

"Oh, yes, for a few weeks. Oh, Laurie, how silly it is. I don't want you to work for me. I don't want you to do anything for me. Don't, don't talk about it. It is so lovely here, so—so warm, and it's the last time. Don't let us argue. I never argue without getting angry. Things will come right by-and-by. We will be happy. I *will* be happy," she cried, defiantly, not offering to remove her hand which he had taken.

"You do care," he insisted in a low tone. "This hour is mine, darling. Let it be one to remember; let me forget everything else for a moment. Don't be so hard. She will never know. You want to give her

so much, be kind to me now and I won't ask you again, I promise, I swear that the future can go. I'll be good to her. I'll do anything you say, anything." His murmured words died away to a whisper, as he pressed closer and found that she did not shrink from him.

"She—she must never know," she said, with a little sob; "it's the last time."

"The last time," he agreed, utterly unmindful of what he was saying.

She felt his breath on her cheek. She saw the gayly colored lamp slowly revolving above her head. It seemed to her excited fancy like a great star in the sombre room coming nearer and nearer to crush her. Involuntarily she moved to the corner of the divan, then his face came between her and the light. A nameless terror took possession of her. She tried to speak but no words came. The lips that he touched so exultingly, were like marble. The look in her eyes startled him.

"Is—is my coat dry?" she said, feebly, pushing him from her. "Laurie, please, I must go. I'm not angry now, maybe I will be by-and-by, but I'm not now. You said you'd go with me. There—there's my cap."

He gave it to her, still without speaking. His face was deathly white, and the hand that helped her on with her coat trembled visibly. Once outside they discovered that the rain had ceased. He drew her arm within his own as he said, huskily:

"It's over, I can't go on."

"You mean?"

"I mean, God only knows what I mean, but I'll have to tell her, then—then you must decide."

"I must decide?" she repeated slowly after him.

"Yes."

"You—you won't tell her to-night."



"No."

"Nor to-morrow?"

"I don't see what is gained by waiting. I wouldn't relish playing the rôle of the missing bridegroom."

"No, no, of course not," she said, hurriedly; "but I want you to wait till Wednesday—Wednesday night. I will see you then. Will you promise?" she entreated, and in the end she had her way.

He felt like a person walking in his sleep. A huge dark bank of the unpleasant was looming up around him. It could not be avoided. It must be met and pierced, for beyond it lay his soul's desire.

It needed more than a bantering word of impatient resistance to restrain him now. The single touch of her beautiful lips had beaten down her defense. He had seen her weakness and he longed for a complete conquest.

She made him leave her at the gate. Although she had eaten nothing since luncheon, the idea of food was abhorrent. Janet met her in the hall. They assumed that she had dined at Miss Penelope's. She spoke of Laurie's having walked home with her and no further questions were asked.

Alone in her room, she sought her desk and deliberately destroyed a letter which she had written that morning, and which stood ready to be mailed. It bore the name: Arnold M. Mainwaring, 53 South Elm Street, Norwood. Finding some paper, her pen began to travel rapidly over the page. Her eyes were glittering, her head was burning but her hands were like ice.

"It's the only way," was her inward comment. "Poor boy, six weeks will cure him. No one could stand me for more than six weeks. The chances are

Aunt Lydia will have a fit and Neta will—will wonder, but it's no matter." She bit the end of her pen nervously, as she reviewed what she had written, then she signed herself, in big sprawling letters: "Yours devotedly, Edna T. Morvick."

Wednesday morning at breakfast, a telegram lay at her plate. She tore it open carelessly and read—

"New York, March 15th.

"Was called here last night. Letter forwarded. Will be with you Thursday. You have made me the happiest man on earth. God bless you.

"ARNOLD."

She put another lump of sugar in her coffee before handing the bit of paper to Janet.

"It's from Arnold Mainwaring," she explained cheerfully. "We are engaged." Robert's fork fell from his hand. Janet's face grew white to the lips. The blind man alone found his voice.

It was a full hour before anything like tranquillity settled upon her astonished relatives.

"I'm fond of him, Neta; oh, yes," she said to her sister in their first private discussion of the news. "You know you like him yourself. 'E's not very 'andsome but 'e's good, as Granny Keeler says of her black pig. He's not very eloquent either, but then I can talk enough for two. He—he tried to ask me last week when he was here, but I wasn't ready to listen then, so Friday night he wrote. It was a nice letter. I didn't decide to accept him till last night, I mean Monday night. I didn't tell you about it because—because I didn't want to be influenced. Aunt Lydia would have wanted to know how much he got a month, and all that sort of thing and I hated to have him talked about. I don't

mean to be married for years and years; he knows that, so you needn't be alarmed."

Milly opened the door for her that afternoon, and the sight of Milly's happy face stopped the foolish beating of her heart and restored her composure, as she followed her friend into the room where the others sat.

Laurie had a magazine on his knee, but upon her entrance it slipped to the floor. A desultory conversation followed, in which he took no share. Once or twice she addressed him directly, but her effort to make him talk was unsuccessful.

He watched her, however, with ill-concealed eagerness. Just before dinner was announced, she rose to go, and no amount of urging could induce her to remain for the meal. He saw Milly obediently get her hat and wrap, then he started to his feet and their eyes met.

"I want you to come with me past the Keelers'," she said with one of her sweetest smiles. "Milly will not be jealous, and you shall tell her something when you return—something that will surprise her. Come."

Milly's face already gave signs of mild curiosity, but she observed them go down the drive together with a sudden amused conviction that this mysterious request on Edna's part, was but her way of establishing amicable relations between herself and the man whom she had so often affected to dislike.

There was a touch of spring in the air to-night. The croaking of a distant frog, in the hollow adjoining Miss Penelope's, could be dimly heard. Edna glanced up at him furtively as he strode on by her side. The Keelers' shanty was but a few rods ahead.

"You have kept your word," she began, abruptly. "Now, you will thank me. I—I was certainly not my-

self the other night. I'm afraid my manner deceived you. I'd never been in a—a room just like that before and I was tired and blue and—and well, you were justified if you gathered a wrong impression; I mean if you think I cared——”

“Think?” he interrupted, wonderingly, “I knew—I——”

“Oh, no, you didn't,” she went on, speaking so lightly, that it was only by a mighty effort that he permitted her to proceed. “My—my letting you kiss me didn't signify anything. I—I don't think much of such things, though of course you didn't know that then; but I think it's generally admitted that one can't love two men at the same time——”

“What?” he demanded fiercely, turning and seizing her arm with a grip of iron strength.

“I will tell you, if you will hear me sensibly. I am engaged, honestly engaged, to Arnold Mainwaring, with all the solemnity that you and Milly consider proper. Now go home and tell her. Be careful. I'm sure Granny Keeler is in that window.”

But he said nothing. He simply raised her chin and gazed long and searchingly at the uplifted face. It seemed as though he were looking at her soul. She shrank back, but her eyes met that passionate stare of his without flinching. She felt herself slowly growing numb, but not a muscle quivered and he dropped his hand.

“You've scored one more victory,” he said, savagely. “You've done a bit of acting that will add to your stock in trade and be useful in your dramatic club, but the curtain's down on your little part.”

“Oh,” she said, with a shake of her head, “I knew you would get angry and be very lofty. Of course

there isn't an atom of gratitude in you. I didn't really look for it. What day in April have you set for the wedding?" He started and his face grew a shade whiter. She put out her hand but he refused to see it. "Not even friends, then?" she continued, questioningly. "It is just as well. We would never agree very long as—as anything. I am a coquette and you are——"

"Stop," he said, roughly, "I'm not in a mood to be analyzed." He heard her say good-night and let her disappear from his sight across the field that led to the Kingston road, before he turned to retrace his steps; but Milly saw him no more that night.

He had no strength to face the scrutiny of her anxious gaze. He could not talk to her, with his brain in such a turmoil of anger and amazement. He could not listen to her voice, with that other voice ringing in his ears. Hours must pass and the whole situation be calmly reviewed before he would venture into her presence; and starting at a brisk pace for home, he ordered a horse saddled and dashed recklessly, madly along the country roads, courting forgetfulness and trying with pitiful desperation to bring his judgment into action again.

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## CHAPTER XX.

MARCH had gone, but in departing, had left one of his wildest storms in gentle April's care. The fury of the wind along the coast was something terrific. Alternate squalls of rain and snow scurried across the town and beat remorselessly on those unfortunate enough to be out of doors. The streets were slippery and walk-

ing perilously uncertain. To one wayfarer, at least, this fact was unimportant. Darting out from a group of loungers in a corner saloon, he went quickly, in the very teeth of the gale, never pausing until he reached the iron gate fronting Miss Penelope's. The house was brilliantly lighted. Carriages were constantly arriving; carefully protected figures could be seen hurrying up the steps and disappearing into the warmth within. No one noticed the boy crouching in the shadow of the veranda. No one saw that pair of eager eyes glued to the window. The wind howled around his defenceless head; his cap was stiff with ice and his hands miserably stiff with the cold. But still he stood and watched. Almost every expression which the human countenance can wear appeared upon his pallid face. He had heard that there was to be a wedding to-night and he meant to see it. Suddenly a gleam of deepest malice shot from his eyes. Involuntarily he started closer to the window, trembling visibly with the passion of hatred that agitated him. Under an arch of beautiful flowers stood the bride and groom. No sound assailed his ear. It was a dumb show, but he understood its import. His gaze softened a little as he looked at the bride, but it was only a momentary flash of friendliness. His breath came in gasps as he muttered: "I'll do it yet, Kathie—I'll do it yet. He—he drove you away—I know. I'll never forget." His stiff fingers fell nerveless at his side. Two big tears gathered and rolled down his thin cheeks. Then without another glance he turned and slunk away.

Milly was a lovely bride, but during the ceremony her face had been almost as white as her gown. Miss Penelope's past weeks of anxious preparation were liberally rewarded, and glancing from Milly, surrounded by those eager to offer their congratulations, to the

decorations of her rooms, she congratulated herself upon the success of the general effect. She wished she could forget the storm without. Neal had laughed at her, and Milly herself had been serenely unaffected by it, but it was certainly most unpropitious weather for a wedding.

The gentle hum of many voices reached Janet as she sat, half screened by a big palm, for the moment alone. She enjoyed watching the faces about her. Understanding Miss Penelope's principles well, she was quite undisturbed about Robert. There would be no temptation for him to-night and she sent him a smiling glance as he stood talking to the Captain, some paces from her chair. A few years at the utmost, she thought, would kill her dread of these occasions on his account. Every day was taking him further away from the power of a habit that had once enchained him. She looked at him with beaming eyes. How much every one appeared to like him! The sound of his infectious laugh brought a smile to her own lips. From her husband, her attention wandered to his brother. He was standing with Milly at his side, listening rather than talking to the group surrounding him. He was unquestionably the handsomest man in the room, but his manner was oddly constrained and such a measure of unusual reserve and dignity did not sit lightly upon him.

Janet found herself wondering dreamily if Milly would always be happy with him. There was a certain expression about his mouth to-night that repelled her strongly. It was not difficult to foretell whose would be the master mind in this union. On the whole she felt relieved that he was at last safely married. She had always feared that Edna would become attached to him, and she would never have approved of a marriage

between him and her sister. For a week or two she had been trying to realize the fact that Edna's future was assured; however volatile the young woman in question might be, she had of her free will accepted a man abundantly qualified to temper her vagaries by his own solid good sense. She moved her chair a little as the man of whom she was thinking elbowed his way through the throng and took a seat at her side. She was astonished at the warmth of her feeling for him. It had never been a habit of hers to arrive at this point of strong liking for a person without a long study of their characteristics, hidden and apparent, and her acquaintance with Mainwaring was only a matter of a few months. Edna had spoken truly when she deplored his want of beauty. He was a slender, long-limbed young fellow, with a clean shaven face, a very prominent nose and a shock of straight black hair. He carried himself awkwardly and he had not yet outgrown his boyish uncertainty as to how to dispose of his hands and feet. They always struck him as being an unhappily prominent part of his person. People, however, readily forgave him his want of grace—he had a very speaking pair of honest, gray eyes—too frank by far for a lawyer to carry, his father told him, and his amiability was a proverb among his friends. He clasped both hands about his knee now and seemed to be searching for some one in the room.

"Where is Edna?" asked Janet, noting his expression; "I haven't seen her since the ceremony."

"I left her talking with Charlie Warner in the hall," he replied. "She's got an awful headache—I wish she would let me take her home early. I can borrow a trap. She looks like a ghost."

"Oh, she's not ill," said his companion, reassuringly.



"They will probably dance by-and-by. She would not miss that." At this moment Mainwaring hurriedly vacated his chair, for the subject of their conversation appeared and joined them. She looked very slim and girlish in her dainty evening gown, but there was an air of languor and weariness about her that contrasted strangely with her customary gaiety.

"I am tired," she said, soberly. "Weddings aren't a bit interesting. There is only one individual in the room worth looking at, and that's the bride. Do observe the child! She thinks that miserable old man means everything he is telling her. Arnold, I believe after supper you will have to take me home. I have just promised Charlie Warner four waltzes and I am perfectly certain one even would leave me a dead weight in his arms."

"So I was just saying to Mrs. Cameron," hastily interjected her betrothed, but she waved aside his eager acquiescence.

"My dear boy, speak the truth. You couldn't have told her what you did not know. May be I won't go after all if you will promise to decoy Charlie into Neal's room and lock him up. He tires me to-night. Ah, I guess we are to adjourn to the feast. Brother Robert is bearing down upon us." Miss Penelope's idea of a wedding feast was only bounded by the banishment of wine. Aside from this omission her lavishness was excessive. She had spared no trouble, and the result appealed to every one. The musicians started a dreamy waltz just as the bride disappeared to don her travelling-gown and there was a lull in the conversation. Janet's glance unconsciously sought her husband. He was talking to an old friend of his father's. She saw Laurie and the Captain approach, after which all four

left the room. The minutes flew by, the music ceased and started again. Janet was striving to be agreeable to the minister's wife, but her gaze was frequently fixed on the doorway through which she had seen Robert pass. At last there was a general pressing toward the hall. Following the rest, she perceived Laurie standing at the top of the stairs with Milly, about to descend, and then ensued a rather boisterous leave-taking amid showers of rice. A gust of wind whirled through the rooms as the door was opened and then closed; the lights flickered, and those remaining were reminded of what they must brave an hour or so hence. Silent tongues were loosened; laughter and merriment became general. Quick hands soon cleared the parlors of superfluous chairs, and eager feet were speedily spinning around to the time of the latest waltz.

Janet found a quiet corner. A wave of apprehension was chilling her enjoyment. Nearly an hour had elapsed since she had seen Robert. He had not shown himself even to bid the bride good-bye. She looked up expectantly as Neal crossed the room. "Where is Robert?" she inquired, trying to conceal her anxiety. "He has been very rude, and Edna? Was she with Milly? They have all left me."

"Edna is going to stay over," he said. "I heard Milly ask her. She thinks Aunt Penelope will need another pair of hands here in the morning. She is with Mainwaring somewhere now. Perhaps she didn't come down when they left, but Rob will be here presently. Are you tired?"

"No—yes, I believe I am. Neal, will you get me a glass of water?" He arose at once and as soon as he was gone she went hastily to the hall and to the door of his room, which had not been opened during the

evening. A frightful fear had assailed her. She was trembling violently, but unhesitatingly turned the knob. She paused on the threshold with an exclamation of dismay. Near Neal's table which was divested of its books, stood three men, two were strangers but one was Robert. They were talking excitedly. Her husband's voice seemed to take the lead. A bottle stood at his elbow. A brimming glass was in his hand. She stepped forward. She did not realize that he was not alone and she had touched his arm almost before her presence was remarked. "Robert, come, come home. I want to go home now, at once," she insisted, in a hard, strained voice. Raising a flushed face to hers, it took him a moment to grasp her meaning and then he laughed awkwardly and shook off her hand.

"I am not ready, my dear girl—my friends, Mr. Jordan and Mr. Smith. Don't be cut up, Neta, I'll make it all right—upon my soul I will—go into the other room."

"You must come with me," she repeated, still ignoring the men who were watching her with open amusement.

"Go away," he repeated, with a gathering frown. "I will do as I please. I am my own master. Yes, by Jove, I am."

A rush of angry color flamed into her face. Words arose, but something choked their utterance. She felt faint and giddy. Suddenly her eyes began to darken with indignation. She stepped back from the table and with a sweeping glance that included the men who were with him she said :

"You have outraged the hospitality of this house, aware as you are of the principles that rule it. I know, however, who instigated this addition to what you were given in the other room. I despise him—I will always despise him," she concluded, bitterly. She heard them

laugh. She saw Robert attempt to rise from his chair and her anger turned to repulsion. Without another look, she wheeled about and fled. To enter the parlors again was impossible. Hardly conscious of her own intentions, she flew upstairs, seized a shawl of Edna's and watching her chance, when a dance was in progress, left the house unseen. The cold wind calmed her excitement a little. She stood for a moment on the veranda and pondered. She decided that she would go home and send the carriage for Robert with a note to Neal. She started down the path and the rain beating on her uncovered head made her wind her shawl about her ears. Twice her feet slipped and she came near falling as she reached the gate. Hearing quick steps behind her, she started to hasten her speed and if possible avoid an encounter with some departing guest, but her effort was unavailing. Her foot struck a shelving bit of ice and in another instant she would have fallen headlong on the wet drive.

"Janet! Great Heavens! Are you hurt?" It was Neal's voice; it was Neal's arm that lifted her tenderly to her feet. She shuddered, but stood without assistance and protested that she was not injured.

"Oh, Neal, I must go home. I can't go back to the house. I can't meet people. Robert is—Oh, Neal, you know—he is in your room. Go—go watch him—I am going to send the carriage, I——"

"Yes," he interposed, shortly, "I understand. You need not go in, but you cannot walk home like this. Come back to the veranda, out of the rain. I will get rubbers and a cloak and explain to Aunt Penelope and Edna. Come."

He spoke persuasively, raising his voice to make himself heard in the wind and she did not demur.

Finding a sheltered corner, he promised to return in five minutes. His strength reassured her. It comforted her to perceive that he meant to help her. No one else in the world, she told herself, could help her as Neal could. She hugged the thought. The music sounded weird and far off. It made her head throb. She could not think of Robert. She wondered why she could not plan. Then she remembered that Neal was going to plan for her. She started eagerly when she heard him coming.

"You were so long," she whispered.

"Was I? I couldn't help it. I was looking for these things. Here, take hold of my arm and I will get the rubbers on." He held the umbrella over her carefully as they took their way to the street and kept her close to his side, steadying her steps. She did not speak until they reached the road; then she asked:

"You told them I was going home?"

"Yes."

"And—and they knew why?"

"Aunt Penelope did. Those men who were with him are upstairs now, smoking. I locked him in my room. He will sleep until I get back."

"Yes," she said, brokenly, "he will sleep. Oh, Neal, how could Laurie ask him? Laurie asked him,—I saw him. I don't believe Rob knew, because he went willingly. He would never go willingly; I must try and remember that. I was angry, very angry, when—when I saw him. Why is it? Why do I feel that way? I should only pity him."

"You went in the room?" questioned her companion, as she paused.

"Yes, I went in. I don't know what I said, but he—he—was——"

"I know," Neal interrupted hastily, "but don't think of that. I never in my life saw a man with a head like his. They only had a couple of bottles between three or four. It was Laurie's doing. I knew nothing about it till it was too late. It was unpremeditated on Rob's part."

"Oh, I know that, but what am I to do if he cannot refuse such invitations? He will be sorry—so sorry to-morrow. I know he will promise again. He will swear that this is to be the last time, and then—and then—but I must believe him. I think time will cure him, don't you? Tell me honestly, Neal, you—you have seen men begin as he began a few years ago and yet stop? They don't all meet the same end? Some—some come to realize what they are doing? Tell me of some one you know?" She spoke wistfully. He could not see her face and he was thankful that his own expression was veiled by the darkness. He knew what she wanted him to say, and with an effort to control his voice he added his little crumb of comfort. He told her there were thousands and thousands of men in the world like Robert, and out of that number not ten per cent ever came to final grief. As a bachelor, he would have disgraced them all probably, but as her husband—well they would be proud of him yet—in point of fact they were proud of him already. No man in their midst had such a host of friends; every one liked him. He spoke rapidly, hoping she would not recall his former prediction regarding his cousin. In his heart of hearts he had not changed that first belief, but he would have died sooner than let her perceive his doubt.

"Yes," she said, leaning more heavily on his arm. "I haven't patience enough; that is it. You are right!

his face shows how good he is. Laurie placed him in an awful position to-night, before his father, too, and he dreads so to be laughed at. It is his only fault. Even you don't know his splendid disposition. Nothing ever makes him angry. He is so kind, so gentle to father, so generous to Edna. Oh, Neal, you have done me so much good. If you ever leave here what shall I do; Your judgment is so clear and you know all about my life—you know all my aspirations. I think you understand me even better than Robert does."

"Yes, I understand you," he said in a tone so low that the wind carried the sound of his voice from her, and she continued:

"You must take the carriage back. Parker was not ordered to come for us until one. I thought Edna would want to stay until then. But it cannot be far from that hour now."

Kitty admitted them with a little astonished stare which Neal was quick to note.

"Mrs. Cameron is chilled. Have some hot tea sent to the sitting-room at once," he ordered, his face flushing.

He assisted Janet in removing her wraps, then poked the fire until it promised to be in a blaze ere long, then poured out a cup of the steaming tea which had been brought, and watched his companion drink it gratefully.

"Don't wait up," he urged, when the carriage was ready. "Go to bed. I'll come over with Rob and we will probably smoke."

"Yes," she agreed, "you know your room then, the blue one. You can't go back to-night."

He stood leaning against the mantel, looking down upon her with far more tenderness than he dreamed of

in his gaze. It rushed over her afresh how good and unselfish he was. Tears sprung to her eyes and her lips quivered. In an instant he had stooped and was holding both her hands.

"Don't do that," he entreated, "I can't bear it. You are tired and unstrung; let me see you go to your room. Just make up your mind to sleep. Don't wait and listen for us." His sympathy made her as docile as a child. He watched her creep up the stair, standing by the front door till she disappeared on the upper landing, then with a sigh, started again for the gay scene which they had left.

As she had predicted, Robert woke the next morning in a very humble and penitent frame of mind. After Neal had gone, he insisted upon her driving into Norwood with him and when she declined this overture he decided to remain at home. He could not bear her out of his sight. When Edna returned that afternoon, she found him stretched comfortably on the couch in the sitting-room, with Janet close beside him reading aloud.

"We have swept up enough rice to furnish Causauqua with puddings for fifty years," said the girl, gaily. "Every chair reposes in its appointed place and Aunt Penelope is taking long, deep breaths of satisfaction. If Arnold comes, tell him that I am going to take a nap and cannot see him until to-morrow."

"Cool, I declare," put in Robert; "I suppose we are to entertain him?"

"If you like—I wash my hands of the task," and she disappeared.

It was almost three weeks, since she had written her impulsive acceptance of Mainwaring's proposal. Three weeks since he had discovered her alone in the



billiard-room and made the first real eloquent speech of his life. He had never found her in quite such a serious mood before, and her manner, her clinging childish abandonment, her genuine tears and remarkable tenderness, had fanned his already strong love into a flame that would burn as long as he lived. But, though she wore his ring and acknowledged their engagement, he could never induce her to consider the question of their ever being married. She was very vague about that, as she was on many other points. Indeed he spent many hours in her company that went far from according him absolute bliss. He had always known her to be capricious. She had struck him literally dumb, upon more occasions than one during the period in which her wonderful eyes had first begun to work havoc with his heart, but he was forced to confess that her moods then had been wonderfully even, compared with some of the transformations to which she treated him now. He did not understand her. But as the days and weeks of spring glided by, submission to her wishes and commands became a sort of second nature. He never desired to thwart her for an instant. The most outrageous snubbing never made him angry. She frequently tied his tongue, but she never saw a flush of resentment in his honest eyes. There were moments when all this affected her. Moments when she made him believe he was as necessary to her as she was to him, and his spirits would ascend to the seventh heaven, only to fall again dismally.

"You expect so much of me," she said to him one day. "How long is it going to take you to learn my capabilities? In various ways, both pretty and practical, I have intimated my unchanging fondness for your own foolish self. I have done the very worst thing

that I can ever do to any man—I have promised to live with you all my life, but don't expect daily, hourly, dissertations on the subject by word and look. Now come here and I will be good and we will talk about—"

"Yes," he said, instantly slipping into a chair drawn close to the couch on which she sat.

"We will talk about brides," she went on.

"Yes, my bride."

"Oh, no, our bride. I had a letter last night; they are coming home—such a dear, sweet, wifely letter. She speaks of him as her husband once. I don't know how she refrained from writing it in capitals. She says he is very good to her, and she don't know what she has done to be so happy. Oh, Arnold, it is lovely to get such letters. They are going to stay here for a while at Randlemead. What will our shy little bride do in that big house?"

"Miss Railson's house is a good-sized one," remarked Mainwaring, who was practical about everything not connected with his fiancée; "she was not lost or out of place in that."

"Yes, but she was only a girl; now she must support the transcendental dignity of belonging to Mr. Laurence Cameron."

"I can't understand why you do not like Cameron," he said.

She bent forward and regarded him for a moment in silence. "No? Don't try to understand it—it is one of the mysteries of the neighborhood. Previous to my appearance in the social firmament, his path was strewn with broken hearts; he had only to look to conquer. Milly lost her heart in her first interview. He looked at me and I looked at him—the result the world can read. I looked and lived—to torment you."

"You shall never be sorry," he rejoined, earnestly, his face brightening, "never for an instant, if I can prevent it. I believe you care a little, not one millionth part as strong as I do, but a little. Nothing else matters. I have got that one fact stowed away—no one but you can ever take it from me. With years perhaps it will grow. I will be patient. I will never let it grow less by fault of mine. I won't tease you, I swore last night I wouldn't tease you again about the time. I will wait. I am thankful—upon my word, I am thankful to be allowed to wait."

"Oh, you are? Such humility is very praiseworthy, but you are good, vastly too good for me. I haven't the remotest idea of being married for years. Things are lovely as they are, aren't they?"

He nodded and she laughed at his rueful expression. "Neta says I abuse you. Aunt Lydia says the chances are you will abandon me after a while. Brother Robert says I am contrary by nature, and you say——"

"And I say you shall please yourself," he finished, promptly.

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## CHAPTER XXI.

FOR the first time in many months Captain Cameron acknowledged himself unreservedly pleased, with his younger son. Laurie had made a highly desirable marriage, and during the honeymoon the Captain proceeded to show his approbation in a very substantial and practical manner. He had refurnished and redecorated four large connecting rooms for the young people's use, and in these sumptuous apartments they were accordingly

installed on their return, with the old man's blunt admonition to stay in them and quit roaming from pillar to post like a pair of gypsies.

It was quite natural that Milly should find favor in her father-in-law's eyes. She had not been under his roof three days before he graciously accorded her permission to read aloud to him. She was also a ready listener. He found himself drawing upon his reserve stock of sea-yarns with sensations of delight he had not experienced for years. There was never a quiver of doubt traceable on her face as to the truth of these stories. She never permitted him to tell a tale and then remind him that he had favored her with it before. Her interest and attention never wavered, and he grew to expect her to spend an hour or more with him in the library every morning.

Miss Randle received the enlargement of their family circle with rapturous delight. She bewildered Milly at every turn with her numerous suggestions, and her outbursts of confidence were more alarming still. After a few words of advice and explanation from Laurie, Milly decided that she was mildly insane, and her perplexity as to how she should treat Miss Randle consequently disappeared. Old Mrs. Cameron occupied the most of the young bride's spare moments. Nothing could succeed in establishing Milly's identity in that old lady's clouded mind, but she learned very quickly to watch and wait for the girl's step outside her door.

Two months of married life had strengthened Laurie's early ideas of Milly's desirability as a wife. He could not help being fond of her in his way,—indeed, had it not been for an unpleasant memory, he would doubtless have considered himself very comfortably in love. She understood and suited herself to his moods with a rap-

idity that startled him. She studied his slightest wish, she often divined what he did not express. Her greatest happiness appeared to be in pleasing him, and yet she was never effusive and rarely demonstrative. He clearly perceived her devotion but she never obtruded it to the point of making him uncomfortably alive to the difference in their feelings. She was singularly self-reliant in all matters that pertained to herself alone. Matrimony, instead of bringing him new duties, seemed to slip many little obligations that he had in the past been wont to personally perform on to another's shoulders. Of course, he did not deliberately plan that this should be so. Milly's course was too unobtrusive to show off his selfishness in glaring colors, but the leaven was working and his best friend, the woman who idolized him, was slowly but surely fostering his most unlovely characteristic.

They had been at home about five days before they saw anything of Edna, and then one evening she called with Mainwaring. She played and sang with the utmost good-nature. She insisted upon Laurie's giving the company a minute account of their trip. She covered Mainwaring with confusion by proposing that they should go over the same ground one day, following this astonishing suggestion by glances and smiles and a sly word or two now and then so impressively affectionate that his embarrassment momentarily increased. They were assembled in Milly's own pretty reception room. A room filled to repletion with all manner of dainty bits of coloring, from the light-tinted walls, that set off various specimens of Laurie's handiwork, to the pyramids of bright cushions on the broad couch and the exquisitely draped lamps on the small tables scattered here and there. Edna

wore white, she knew how delicate and fragile she looked in dead-white and often affected it. Mainwaring had a hazy perception that she embodied his idea of an angel sitting there in the soft light, while Laurie felt with a sudden spasm of jealousy, that he would far rather have her become the angel that she looked than belong to another man. It was utterly impossible, he told himself, when Milly got up and took her friend's place at the piano and Edna dropped into a rocker against which Mainwaring was leaning, to think that he could live here and have any peace. Married or single, it seemed that he could not forget, and as for Mainwaring, it would have eased his feelings very much could he have taken that inoffensive young man bodily and relieved them of his presence. All through Milly's careful execution of a difficult movement, he watched the pair near him. An unreasonable and violent hatred rose up within him for the man towards whom she was so adoringly gracious. He felt that some one had done him a terrible injury and he was smarting for revenge. To one of the party his face betrayed him. She looked across the room and got a glimpse of his moody, harassed expression and her own glance fell. She could not tell why, but she was frightened and moving closer to Mainwaring she childishly touched the hand that lay on the arm of her rocker.

"It isn't particularly entertaining to visit Milly when her lord and master is present," she said, to her lover on their way home. "Laurie is an execrable host. I don't think he asked us to come again. Milly tried to atone for his omission, but Milly's voice is very feeble without his behind it. She looks happy, doesn't she?"

"Very," he admitted, briefly.

"I can tell that she is," went on the girl. "Oh,

Arnold, I was glad to have you there to-night. I looked at you, and I felt so sure of myself, so safe, so——” she paused, and began to laugh immoderately.

Arnold became alarmed.

“Don’t, it will do me good ; let me laugh. There is nothing to laugh at, of course, but I want to—I——”

“You are tired,” he suggested. “This walk is too long.”

“No, it is not ; I adore this walk. I wouldn’t have it a rod shorter. Now I am serious, see ? Oh, Arnold, why—why do you care for me ? I do nothing but perplex and trouble and torment you. There is not a grain of sense in what I say—but you will never get tired, will you ? You will never leave me alone ?”

“Leave you,” he murmured, putting his arm about her waist, for they had gained a lonely part of the road, “that is a very idle question.”

“Now, I know,” she insisted ; “but suppose you should find out that—that I was deceitful and pretended to feel what I didn’t, and—was not nearly as truthful as you think—then would you go ?”

“Don’t talk of such things. Nothing on God’s earth but your own wish would ever send me from you.”

“My own wish, that is just it,” she cried, excitedly. “Some day I may say go, but don’t leave me ; promise not to believe that—that I really want you to.”

“I promise.” And then she did what she had never done before : she raised her face and voluntarily kissed him out of the fullness of her gratitude.

It was some days before she ventured over to Randlemeade again. Milly visited her, and they took several long walks together ; but she did not ask Mainwaring to spend another evening with her friends. Early in July

she heard that Laurie intended to take Milly to Europe. The trip was seriously discussed, the Captain's stormy objections set aside, Miss Penelope's misgivings trampled out of sight, and the sailing day at length set. Milly had just been over with this last piece of news. They spent the whole afternoon in the hammocks under the nut-trees on the lawn. Milly had been unusually talkative. "She was so happy," she said, "to get Laurie away. It did not agree with him at Randlemeade, his father constantly annoyed him. He was restless, and she feared he really would be ill unless he made a change," and Edna had deepened her anxiety by remarking that he certainly did look care-worn. But as soon as her little burst of sarcasm had left her lips she had hastened to dilate on the reviving properties of an ocean voyage. She was alone now, sitting on the veranda, in the July twilight. Her father was asleep in the billiard room. Janet and Robert had driven to an open-air concert in Norwood and Arnold for once was missing. She listened nervously to a great June bug plunging stupidly against the window behind her chair in a mad effort to reach the light within. A heavy group of vines hid the drive from her view and, therefore, she did not see that a visitor was approaching until he reached and mounted the steps. Then she started up. "At last," she said, petulantly, but the form that came quickly to her side was not Arnold's but Laurie's, and she drew back with an exclamation of surprise.

"I thought——" she began.

"I know what you thought," he supplemented hastily, "your disappointment will doubtless not warm you welcome, but are you really alone?"

"Really alone, and monarch of all I survey."



"More truly than you imagine," he remarked seating himself.

"Where is Milly?"

"At home. She was tired. I—I—want to see Robert."

"You knew perfectly well that he was going to Norwood, for he said he asked you and Milly to go with them."

"Very well, then. I didn't come over to see Rob: I came to see you. I came with the hope that your shadow would be missing for once and fortune has favored me."

"Fortune always favors you," she said, beginning to wish that her father would waken, or Arnold arrive. She drew her bit of light blue crepe that served for a shawl, tightly about her shoulders and buried her hands in its folds.

"You don't for one moment believe that," he proceeded, recklessly. "You know how tortured I am. You know what is driving me to put the ocean between us. You know, and it only affords you amusement. You have wrecked my life and you are going to wreck another's. You don't love him. You would cast him off to-morrow if the humor seized you." He spoke vehemently, and her cheek paled.

"You are very insulting," she said, brokenly. "How dare you tell me that I don't—I don't——"

"Because I know you don't," he continued, his pent-up grievance finding vent. "You came vastly nearer caring for me—you did care, for an hour, and then you drove me mad by engaging yourself to him. Why did you do it, why did you let me put my life in fetters? Edna, why did you, tell me, and I will forgive you. Tell me that it was not an idle dream on my part. I beg,

I beseech you give me that one little crumb to live upon, it is all I ask. We are going Tuesday. It will be months before I shall see you again. I must go, but let me take something with me, one little word." He bent forward eagerly and her lips quivered. She tried to move her chair away from his, but his foot was on the rocker and she could not move it.

"I never had a good opinion of you before. I despise you now," she stammered, covering her face with her hands. "Oh, Laurie, don't look at me like that. Please go home, please don't talk to me. I—I am so unhappy."

"Unhappy," he repeated, hoarsely. "I wish I could believe that you were."

"I am, I am," she wailed, the thought of her own misery out-weighing her prudence. "I am perfectly, utterly miserable. But oh, how selfish you are to want me to be. I know you want me to be, I know it, and I hate you for it. I hate you for making me say it."

"I don't think you can charge any one with being selfish," he put in hastily, "and I think I understand the meaning of the smiles you bestow upon poor Mainwaring. It flashed into my mind the other day when I met you with him. You are afraid and you are hiding behind him. You spoiled my life. Don't ruin his also."

She uncovered her eyes and glanced at him apprehensively. "Would—would I be doing that?" she asked in a low tone. A new idea suddenly dawned upon him. If he could make her throw Mainwaring over, he would have one less bitter certainty to take with him. If he could not have her himself, he did not want to be tortured by the thought that some one else had suc-

ceeded in winning her. He had sought her to-night with no special object in view. His anxiety about Mainwaring's future had that instant sprung into life fully fledged and he rang the changes on it in terms so convincing that she became terrified at the enormity of her own intentions. He pleaded with her wildly but eloquently.

"You don't love him," he urged, "and you never will. I will not trouble you any more, I am going away. I am not a scoundrel. I will be good to her—she doesn't know; but think and be guided by me. He would never forgive you in the future if he should find out." He dwelt on the subject. It rang in her ears until every little stab of conscience that had assailed her since her engagement, gathered in one piercing, crushing, overwhelming agony of remorse.

"I don't love him, I don't love him," she repeated, miserably—"not as he loves me; but you don't know how good he is, how patient. I can't—I can't tell him. He never thinks of himself, always of me. What can I do? Oh, I wish I had never seen him. I make everybody miserable,—but I am miserable. I don't know what it is to be happy,—I never will know. And you are glad. You want to hear me say it. I won't tell you any more. You are wicked. Why, oh why, did you come over here to-night?"

"I had to come," he said, remorselessly. "In all this superabundance of pity for yourself you might spare me a little. You are suffering for your own folly. If you had been true to yourself, if you had not outraged every womanly instinct and deceived me, do you think I would have done as I did? I would have made you marry me. Heavens! when I think of your daring to look me straight in the eyes that night with

that lie on your lips and that black lie in your heart it makes my brain reel."

"It was for her," she murmured, almost inaudibly, "and I didn't care so very much."

"For her? I suppose you think you have done her a good turn. I suppose you revel in your magnanimity. What do you think will come of it? It would be hard to tell if I should stay here."

"But you are not going to stay here," she interrupted hastily, "you are never going to stay here."

"Not for the present, but you seem to forget that I have interests here."

"Interests?" she questioned.

"Yes, interests; but I only spoke of Mainwaring for his good and yours. You will find it a fearful struggle. You are wrong if you think I don't want you to be happy. I do. Are—are you going to have an understanding with him."

"I don't know—I may. But not because I regret anything about you," she added, bitterly, "because I don't. I never would have been happy with you. Do you suppose I would have humored you as Milly does? Never. No, I don't care about that; please don't go away thinking I do. I would never dare look Milly in the face, now—go home."

He rose to his feet as she spoke, but she still sat cowering in the corner of the chair. Twice he walked to the steps only to return to her side. The sight of her tear-stained face as revealed by the light in the window, oppressed him. She looked so crushed and wretched that he dared not linger longer, but no word was spoken. She heard the sound of his departing steps growing fainter and fainter on the gravel and then she leaned forward and buried her face in her

hands, beginning to sob convulsively. She could not have given a cause for her grief. It was an unrestrained and thoroughly childish fit of weeping. She was entirely unmindful of her surroundings. She did not even perceive that she was not alone until she felt a pair of strong arms about her and heard a voice whisper: "Edna, come, you will be ill. Here is my handkerchief,—I know, I know all about it. Don't try to tell me, darling, not to-night. I came across lots and stopped at the barn to see Parker a moment. I came up on the other side of the vines, and I couldn't help hearing. Do you feel better? Look up."

"I am better, I am all right now. I am glad, Arnold, I am glad you heard. But you don't hate me? I couldn't stand it to have you do that. It has been such a dreadful year. I meant to do right. I loved her truly. I met him once alone, and he saw that I did care more than I had owned before. I could not help it,—I never meant that he should know. I don't know how it happened. But I was so frightened about her. You see I didn't care so very much. Then your letter came,—but I always liked you, Arnold, always."

"Yes," he said, slowly, "you always liked me."

"And I thought," she went on with increasing excitement, "I thought in time I would do more than that. I—I was beginning to—till——"

"I know," he put in quickly, "don't say it."

"Oh, I know what you think, but you are wrong. He is Milly's husband; I will never forget that, never for a single instant. But you see——"

"Edna, I know; don't torture yourself and me by going into details. I don't believe I—I can plan to-night, only this, you shan't be bothered after to-night."

"Then we are not engaged?" She looked up at him through her wet lashes and the gleam of relief in her eyes strengthened his trembling resolve, and he continued, boldly:

"Not as we were before. I must have been an awful nuisance to you at times. Looking back I can understand a tremendous amount that has been a sealed book to me in the past. I must run out to Denver a while this summer. Father has some property there that needs attention. But one single word will always bring me to you as fast as steam can get me here. You may need me some time."

"Yes," she said, gratefully, "I will remember. I will send for you. I—I shall miss you, but of course I understand that you don't want me after I have deceived you. I know you are dreadfully disappointed, but I seem to feel most sorry for myself. I don't know what Neta will say."

"You need not explain," he interposed. "She need not know for a while that we have changed our minds. They will be back now soon. Come inside and bathe your eyes. Where is your father?"

"Asleep.—Oh, Arnold, I wish he had not gone to sleep!"

"Never mind, now; you are cramped and stiff, and even your lips are pale. I will never ask you again, would you mind,—would you mind——" He paused.

She divined what he wished, and instantly lifted her face to his. "You are not going right away?"

"I will wait until they come."

"No, I mean to Denver."

"Not for a week or two."

"You forgive me?"

"I have nothing to forgive."

"Yes, you have. Oh, Arnold, don't be a saint. You know you have oceans of things to forgive."

"Very well, then, I forgive you."

When he left her, his first positive sensation was a feeling of hatred against Laurie Cameron, but after he had nursed this in bitterness for a while his thoughts returned to the girl who had been so suddenly and so terribly taken out of his life. His ideas of the future were not in the least connected. He only knew that he trusted her implicitly and this trust gradually became allied to a faint hope. His was not the nature to give up easily. He had never in his life planned to obtain any object without straining every nerve to succeed, refusing to acknowledge himself worsted when there was the smallest chance left by which he could win. This dogged persistence was a powerful weapon, and he realized its worth ; but he also understood that time must elapse before he could strike a blow in his own cause.

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## CHAPTER XXII.

WHENEVER Miss Penelope entered Neal's room in the morning, it was evident that she had something important to say, but she never made known her errand at once. She had a mysterious way of approaching the subject in hand and then retreating as though she were not sure that she meant to say anything after all. On this particular occasion, however, she drew her chair close to his, and began to give vent to her feelings.

"You are mistaken, Neal, about the foreign mail. It got in last night. I have just been over to the office. They are coming home. The child writes that

they sail on the sixth. I expect she is nothing but a shadow. It was cruel of him to keep her there in Paris all through the winter and spring, in the very hotel—in the very room, where the baby died. She has tried so hard to pretend that she did not mind, but she couldn't deceive me. I honestly believe that he is glad that the child didn't live. She has tried to prepare me for his callous speeches. She knows he wouldn't show any feeling, and she is puzzling her poor little head to find excuses for him. Neal, I always told you that he was not the man for her, and she will find it out in time if she has not already. He thinks of no one but himself. He is just like his father for all the world."

Her nephew put down his pen and looked up at the troubled face thoughtfully for a moment.

"I think you are a trifle morbid over Milly," he said at last. "I am sure her letters have been cheerful enough. Of course, losing the boy was a blow to her; but it is my opinion that she still believes Laurie to be all that she thought he was in the beginning. My dear aunt, you have not learned that just such men as he are the ones that receive the most affection and love from their wives. She doesn't think that he is selfish; that fault is so large a part of himself that she would feel as though she had lost something if he took to putting his own desires in the background and began to consider hers first. I wonder," he added, after a pause, "if they intend to stay at home now?"

"It is likely. She writes that Laurie has some ideas for a new picture, and she thinks he intends to get at it as soon as they are settled. She says he has done very little the whole year they have been over there. All that expense and nonsense of fitting up a studio.



I knew perfectly well at the time that he would get tired of it as usual. I can't for my part make out what he has done except spend her money."

"Well, she is willing he should do it, and he is a genius in that line without a doubt."

"I know you wish I would go," she remarked, eyeing the work she had interrupted, "but, Neal, I walked as far as New Street with Edna Morvick on my way down town and she told me something about Robert that is worrying me dreadfully. Do you know anything about a man named Ryerson? He owns a big stock farm out near Westfield."

"Yes; he used to be a justice of the peace in Norwood."

"Do you know him well?"

"Very well."

"Do you know that Robert is intimate with him? Edna says they are going into partnership or something on this farm of his. He lives there, I believe, and keeps a sort of bachelor's hall, and Robert has been there twice this week. Perhaps Edna exaggerates, but she says he is completely under this man's control and Janet is breaking her heart. Oh, Neal, why don't you go and talk to him? He will listen to you quicker than any one else. I have been uneasy about him for the last six months. People have been gossiping, and you know Janet rarely goes out anywhere now. And then Edna declares she is just a shadow to what she used to be. Just think of those two boys, both with such good wives, and yet so undeserving of them! I wouldn't mention it to Janet. Edna says she never talks about it even to her, but something ought to be done; don't you think so?"

"Something has been done,—everything has been

done," Neal exclaimed, rising excitedly. "You have told me nothing that I don't know. Nothing that is not constantly before me. Talk to him! I have talked, begged, pleaded, implored him to drop this man Ryerson. What does Robert know about raising horses? It is only a scheme to extort money from him, and his new friends have learned an easy way to accomplish this. He did drive over there Monday night and Wednesday, and I went too. I brought him home at three o'clock in the morning."

"Oh, Neal, Neal! is it as bad as that? He is always so tender-hearted. Can't you persuade him? Don't he realize that he is making her unhappy?"

"Yes, he realizes it, but his regrets don't go deep enough. He never means to hurt her; every time is the last time, and with that conviction in his own mind he expects her to smile and believe him."

"And she does, of course," put in Miss Penelope, with a mournful shake of her head. "But perhaps she is hard; I know I used to think her mouth was a little severe. Perhaps she discourages him. Perhaps if she humored him a little, and made him believe that she did believe him——"

"Hard!" interrupted her companion sharply, wheeling around, "she is the most credulous, the most patient, the most forgiving woman I ever knew. You don't know her—her own relatives don't know her,—and as for Rob——"

"Oh, but, Neal, he is certainly fond of her."

"Yes," he agreed, his excitement abruptly subsiding, "he is fond of her."

His face looked almost haggard as he dropped into his chair again and was silent. She glanced at him apprehensively. There were a good many white hairs

now among the dark locks that she had once curled and fondled with such pride. He was growing more like his father every day, she thought. The same habitually serious expression, the same voice, the same broad shoulders that would lose their straightness before he was fifty and stoop just as his father's had done. There was a very little of her boy left in this stern, self-contained man. Only his eyes were unchanged. She very often caught the old familiar twinkle in their depths, and the sight always warmed her heart.

"Well," she said at last, rising, "I suppose we can only wait and hope, but, oh, I was so sure last year at this time that Robert was all right! I cannot but believe yet that he will come to see what he is doing. But it is dreadful for her. We cannot do anything for her, not even say a comforting word?"

"No, surely not! Some things are better not discussed," he replied, quickly.

She laid her hand on his arm as he bent over his desk. "You are right," she said, softly. "That belief has kept my foolish old tongue silent all these years. I know what she has been to you. You couldn't hide it from me with all your care."

"I didn't wish to hide it," he exclaimed with a dubious smile. "At least all the world is privileged to know how exalted my opinion and regard for her is. Time only strengthens it. But I would be satisfied," he continued, impetuously, "if—if she were happy. That is what is driving me nearly insane. She is battling alone,—alone against great odds, and I can only look on and watch. Can you conceive what I feel to know this when I would give anything to protect her from a breath of suffering?"

"My poor boy," she said, tenderly, "if I could only change things for you!" And then she crept away, rightly divining that it hurt him to have her witness his suffering.

He could not have told how long he sat there staring through the open window. He spent a good share of each day here in this room before his desk, but in his own opinion he had not accomplished a week's real work in long months. He wrote and wrote with a conscientious effort to excel and to get away from a certain round of ideas that seemed to float in and render commonplace every subject that he took up. But the result never satisfied him. Fiction he had not ventured to touch for over a year. He did not believe that he ever would again. He turned with abhorrence from the thought of picturing human suffering or happiness. He saw so much of the former, and the latter he was beginning to believe was, excepting in rare instances, only an empty word. No one, not even Miss Penelope, knew how often he was to be found at Robert's. From the night of Laurie's wedding, Janet had clung to him as the sole person who could help her. With him, her pride disappeared totally. She sought his advice with childlike simplicity. Her eyes grew eloquent with relief whenever he announced his attention of accompanying his cousin anywhere. Her faith in his influence over her husband was abnormal. It seemed to gain force as her belief in her own power lessened. Indeed, with time, it seemed to warp her judgment and every new disappointment had the added sting of an unreasonable conclusion that it would not have occurred had Neal not failed her, had Neal stayed with him, had Neal found him at the right moment.

The evening of the day in which Miss Penelope had

voiced her fears for Robert's future, Kitty admitted Neal with the intelligence that Mr. Cameron was out and Mrs. Cameron had a headache, and had not been down to dinner, but Miss Edna would see him. Concerned to know how much his cousin was to blame for Janet's indisposition, he quickly repaired to the billiard room, where he found Edna curled up on the window-seat alone.

"Neal, can you find a chair? Father pushes them against the wall like that. One would think we had been playing 'London bridge.' Neta is ill,—I suppose Kitty told you."

"Yes, but she said a headache!" he exclaimed with a note of alarm in his voice.

"To the world it is a headache, to you and me, heartache. Oh, I am out of all patience with her. She has scarcely spoken to him since Wednesday night. This noon he came home to lunch and wanted her to go for a drive, but she declined, whereupon he went off alone and has not returned yet. She is so foolish! He knows that she is watching him constantly. She makes him uncomfortable,—desperate at times. Positively he is developing a temper. Women like Neta should never marry. People, I suppose, think she is very clear-headed, with excellent judgment, but she is the veriest child about him. She knew what he was when she married him. He would make most women happy now, but she magnifies everything. Our convivial friend, the ex-Justice, in her eyes, is the incarnation of wickedness. She cannot bear the sound of his name, but she is doing everything in her power to make brother Robert dote on him more and more."

Neal kicked over a footstool and said nothing. He could not discuss Janet or her course with Edna, so

after a pause he changed the subject by grimly remarking :

"For a young lady not out of her teens, you have acquired a very extensive knowledge of men and their ways, haven't you?"

She re-arranged the pillows against which she was leaning and laughed softly.

"I've learned enough about them to advocate the policy of letting them alone, generally speaking."

"Your investigations haven't ended happily, I fear."

"You mean about Arnold," she continued composedly. "Arnold is luxuriating in the wild West. According to his letters he has found a veritable garden of Eden. Some day I may go out and see it for myself, so don't, if you please, get the idea that my investigation in his direction ended disastrously. I only discovered too much nobility, too much goodness,—it oppressed me, and he is wearing some of it off. Oh, what crooked perversity of fate sends such extremes together! Had brother Robert fallen in love with me and Arnold with Neta, things would have been happily equalized. I would have danced around the country after him and drawn him away in triumph from the clutches of the ex-Justice. His little slips would have cast the merest shadow over me, while Arnold and Neta would have grown in grace with the strength of their mutual support. I don't know what height they would have attained in time, but something very unusual." She looked at him aslant from under her long lashes.

"I suppose you know that Milly is coming home," he said, finally.

"Yes, I know. I had a letter to-day, but I shall be away when they arrive. I am going to Middletown

to visit a school friend and will probably be gone a month."

"Indeed! Milly will miss you."

She did not reply. They had both caught the sound of carriage wheels, followed in a moment or two by Robert's voice in the hall, complaining of the darkness. Neal rose and met his cousin as he groped his way in.

"Holloa, Neal, I suppose this is the midget's doings. Nothing delights her more than to have you bang yourself against the furniture in the dark. Where is Neta? I don't see a soul."

"Neta's soul is above, in her room, preparing for a higher ascent perhaps. She is ill," explained his sister-in-law, solemnly.

He did not pause to ask more. They could hear him bounding up the stairs, three steps at a time. A door opened and shut softly and then the house was still again. Edna at this juncture consented to having the lamp lighted, but Neal would not linger, though he longed to know if his cousin's sudden alarm and eagerness to reach his wife didn't argue that, for this night at least, she was to have another breath of that happiness which a reconciliation with one's beloved surely brings.

Hours of waiting were not new with Janet now. They were coming to her thick and fast, hours when every sense seemed united in an effort to listen for a longed-for step. Hours,—long night hours, when she lay, her eyes blinded with tears born of the nervous dread that was sapping from life its every joy. How could she greet him when he came without some show of all this? He could readily read what she had thought, and on the occasions when her suspicions had been groundless his efforts to cheer her up, man-like, became more of a boisterous argument to convince her of her own folly

than any show of regret that his past had surrounded him with such an element of uncertainty. Edna had spoken truly when she had affirmed that Janet's watchfulness was beginning to render him irritable. It made him indignant to perceive that she did not trust him as she had done. He had the arrogance as well as self-confidence of a weak nature. A vivid imagination is a very torturing possession at times. Through the entire afternoon, Janet's fancy had been at work until she had been forced to seek her own room and in solitude and darkness get over these miserable hours of suspense. Scores of trivial instances of her short married life came flocking before her mind. She thought of her early faith, and shivered. The blackness of despair and utter hopelessness seemed to enshroud her. She wondered how she could live out her life with this apprehension as an almost constant companion. She had entirely lost her belief in her own power. Nothing that she could say appeared to touch him. Words froze on her lips when he met her advances with his careless laugh or one of his old promises. Could it be that she was killing his love? It needed a throbbing head, a dark room and the bitterness of a solitary vigil to suggest such an idea as this, but once alive it grew in magnitude, benumbing every other sensation. She stretched out her hands in the darkness,—if he would only come,—if he would only tell her that this new fear was without foundation. If she could see his face and hear his voice once more, nothing else would matter, she cried to herself, if only he loved her still. In her misery she remembered many little insignificant acts of his that gave the force of truth to her aroused suspicion. As the moments dragged by she could not lie still. Groping her way across the floor



she fell on her knees before the couch, where the sound of Edna's voice in the room below struck unmeaningly on her ear. At length her heart nearly stopped beating. She sprang to her feet as the door opened. She gave a little unintelligible cry as he entered and breathlessly threw herself with a burst of hysterical weeping into his arms.

"Neta, for heaven's sake, darling, what is the matter? It is not late. I nearly broke my neck to get home for dinner. Here, come and sit down."

"Dinner? Oh, Robert, it is not that. I have been thinking. I got frightened; but nothing is changed, is it? You feel just the same? Tell me, tell me, I can bear anything else but that."

He led her to the couch and forced her to lie down. In his opinion she was mildly raving. He decided, with fear and trembling, that it was probably brain fever, and he mentally anathematized the ex-Justice, on whose shoulders he was disposed to lay the blame for this unexpected and alarming attack. He did not know what to do or say in his trepidation, so he fell to kissing her hands and stroking her hair, wondering meanwhile if Edna would hear him if he stamped gently on the floor. Edna was cruel to have left her sister alone.

"No, no, dear, I am not ill," she explained, finally. "I came up here because I wanted to be alone; and when I am alone I cannot think of anything but you, and to-night,—to-night, oh, Robert, don't ever go away and leave me again as you did this noon. I—I mean to make you happy,—I don't mean to trouble and worry you by always suspecting——"

"I know," he interrupted, immeasurably relieved to see that she was rational. "It is my own fault, sweet-

heart. No one can be happy with a weighty conscience, and I have carried that around with me for some weeks. You are all right—Ryerson and his schemes can go now, for all I care. We will bury that bone of contention here now. You gave me a terrible fright.”

She nestled closer. “You do care, then, just as much,” she urged, eagerly.

“Care for you? That isn’t a very sensible question, is it?”

“But, Robert, sometimes you don’t show it.”

“Oh, but it is there, let me tell you, safe and strong. I think if there is any question of wavering affection, it is on your side,” he continued, ruefully.

“On my side? Oh, you don’t believe that,” and probably in his heart he did not.

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## CHAPTER XXIII.

MILLY arrived late at night, after her long absence, and it was not until next morning that she found the opportunity to seek her aunt and meet the welcome that awaited her. Miss Penelope had been prepared to see a great change in her niece, and was, therefore, filled with joy to discover that as far as outward showing went, Milly was quite the same. She looked a trifle older, and when they were together in Miss Penelope’s room and she took her old seat on the stool at the elder woman’s side and began to talk of what she had left across the water, there were marks of sorrow traceable on her face too deep for time to have removed thus early. It was both a pain and a pleasure to go into all the details connected with that brief little life

which had been so dear to her. But Miss Penelope was not to be satisfied with mere allusions, and the whole story was told.

"Laurie is very good to me," she said, gratefully, "he humors me. He was dreadfully grieved at the time, but he says men don't feel those things as mothers do."

"I understand." Miss Penelope looked at her quizzically as she offered this explanation of Laurie's indifference to their loss. The words were very firmly spoken, but it was easy to detect the note of reproach behind them. She did not deem it wise to dwell on the subject of Laurie's attitude longer, so she brought the conversation around to a safer topic.

Milly was eager to hear of the recent happenings in the family. She learned with sincere disappointment of Edna's absence. Edna had not written to her for several months and she was curious to know something of her friend's affairs.

"Mainwaring is west," Miss Penelope said, in reply to Milly's inquiries. "He came home once in the winter, but did not stay. For my part, I don't know what to make of the crazy child—her own sister don't know whether the engagement is honestly broken or simply hanging in uncertainty. I know for a fact that they correspond, but that is all. She goes out with others and if she has kept his ring, she don't wear it. As I said to Neal the other day, 'I will be a thankful woman when she gets married. She turns every boy's head that comes around, and it is my opinion that she sets out to.' "

"Oh, I don't believe that," said Milly; "I don't think Edna flirts wickedly. She can't help being lovely. Laurie painted her head last winter from memory. It

was so like her ; only the mouth was a little cruel, I thought, but he got the hair perfect, all those dear little curls at her neck and her eyes seemed almost to speak. It was really excellent, but he got provoked one day and destroyed it. He destroys a great deal,—he says all artists do—dissatisfaction with one's work is a sign of genius."

"Indeed? I would rather have a little less genius, then, and more of common sense," remarked Miss Penelope, sharply, and Milly did not contest the point. She felt that it was useless to argue with her aunt about Laurie's genius. Miss Penelope had never understood him.

As she walked home, she felt like singing aloud because of her joy at being back again. She had no love for city life though she carefully concealed the fact from her husband. She dreaded to meet strangers and feared for Laurie's sake that she would fail to please. He had told her once that she could never hope to be a brilliant woman, but that it lay within her power to entertain a great many people if she exercised a little tact, dropped her old directness of speech, and gave no sign of undue disapproval of what others might say. She had felt very glad that he had thus set her limitation. It was a relief to know that he never expected her to take a place beside the society women to whom she had been introduced during their sojourn in Paris. She had no wish to win the admiration of the world,—she cared nothing about the world. She lived in a little world of her own in which one man was king and supreme ruler. She glanced about with almost loving interest to see if this, her favorite walk through the woods, was unchanged. She thought she remembered every tree. She owned to a sudden

exuberant fondness for them as though they were sentient beings and alive with welcome. Arriving within sight of the house, her expression became serious at once. Ah, there had been a change here. There was an empty room now,—a face gone. They had found the Captain's mother asleep one afternoon in her chair, but it was the long, sweet sleep from which no one could wish to awaken her.

As the studio door stood open, Milly entered that way. Laurie was lounging on a packing box, smoking with industrious violence.

"Back, eh?" he remarked, upon catching sight of his wife. "You didn't stay long. The Captain has exorcised every hammer on the place. There are fifteen hatchets in the tool-room but no hammer."

"Hammer? You mean a claw-hammer? I'll get one."

He had not asked her to get him the desired article, so he waited comfortably until she returned.

"How is Aunt Penelope?" he inquired, setting about his delayed task.

Milly removed her hat and took a seat on the divan. "Very well, she says, but Neal says she isn't as well as usual."

"What is the matter with her?"

"Nothing special; Neal thinks perhaps it is the heat. Laurie, I am afraid Robert isn't doing as well,—as well as he did last year. Aunt Penelope wouldn't say much, but I gathered enough to make me believe that they are not very happy over there."

"Rob is a regular chump," said Laurie, hitting a refractory nail.

Milly was not quite certain what this might mean, so she told him about Edna's absence, the receipt of

which intelligence seemed to entirely stay any rising curiosity about his family.

"I don't know how long she intends to stay," she continued, as he did not speak. "I am afraid she will never make up with Mr. Mainwaring."

"Are you? She might go further and fare better."

"Perhaps, but he was certainly very fond of her. I don't see how a girl can engage herself to a man and then not marry him. It would be very dreadful to me. I could never forget that he——"

"Oh, yes, you would," said her husband, positively. "Those things sit very lightly on some women—at least—women like her. You don't suppose she would remember a man for six months?"

"Edna? Yes, I think she would. I think she remembers him, but for some reason she can't seem to make up her mind to marry him. I wish she would, I think she would be happier; I think every one is happier married. They cannot have any doubts or uncertainties then."

He glanced up from his work with a quizzical smile.

"Doubts are not a part of your composition," said he. "I sometimes think your serenity is a form of egotism. It would be called that in a man."

He knew that she did not understand him. He very often said things to her that she did not understand. It amused him to call that puzzled expression into her brown eyes. It pleased him to have her retain her childlike ignorance of the world. He played upon it, broadening her horizon to suit his own whims, until she became little more than his echo, to be silenced by a glance, or left to sweetly voice his teachings. All the dormant energy, tenacity, and love of ruling that he had inherited from his father and which his previous life of

easy self-indulgence had weakened, leaped into action in his attitude towards his wife. The chief satisfaction that he derived from their relationship lay in his feeling of calm superiority on all points where their respective will power was concerned. He felt that he had sounded her nature to its depth to the discovery of a vast fund of sweet womanly patience, a surprising evenness of temper, a reserve supply of dignity that belonged to a child rather than a woman; an enormous amount of credulity, the whole balanced by the truest, deepest love for himself, but nothing more. There was no corner that he had not penetrated; no concealed force to spring into life and confront him; no new emotion or desire to rise and vary the routine of their lives. There were hours when his soul grew sick within him. Hours when he felt that he was drifting on a deadly even sea without a shadow of hope,—without a single expectation on which to feast his hungry gaze. At such moments he decided that he would welcome any convulsion, though it should leave him stranded on the rockiest shore. He longed to feel something, even a sensation of pain. His temper became variable and he made no effort to control it. He had fits of moody despondency when he railed at the whole scheme of creation, in terms so unreasonable that even Milly would leave him to recover his equanimity alone. She had been told that all talented men were subject to these attacks and she accepted it as truth in Laurie's case, for it was the only explanation to be found.

For the first time since she had known him, he had betrayed a feverish anxiety to get home. During the voyage over he had gladdened her heart by declaring his intention of making Randlemeade their abiding place in the future. He had developed a sudden in-

terest in everything pertaining to his boyhood's home, and disclaimed the idea that he had thought the place dull. He was tired, he said, of being perpetually gaped at by strangers; he meant to settle down and work. Of course they would run up to town for a month or so in winter, but no more long flights; and Milly had hailed the prospect with delight. Now, however, his enthusiasm was subsiding. A week or two had passed and his meditated work was not begun. He clashed with his father on the same old and sadly worn-out topics. He was barely civil to Miss Randle. He read and drove and smoked and wondered why people endured the country, even in summer, all of which made Milly put forth every energy to divert him. She tried to ride with him until the doctor forbade it. She laughed at Miss Penelope's assertion that she was not as strong as she had been. It was the heat, she said, that made her pale, and she had never been able to take long walks in summer.

She regretted that Laurie was so often forced to go by himself and she did not believe that solitary tramps were good for him. As for him, he had not realized that she was not as robust as usual, until she explained, one night, that she could not walk over to Robert's with him.

"I am a little tired," she said, smiling brightly, "and Aunt Penelope made me promise not to go out again to-day. I am not ill, Laurie, but if you don't mind, I'll rest to-night."

"What is the matter with you?" he said, impatiently. "For heaven's sake, don't let Aunt Penelope put notions into your head. She has a firmly rooted idea that Providence does not intend the members of our family to attain a ripe age, but,"—he broke off—"you are white.



Been grubbing out in the garden, I suppose. You must drop that sort of thing."

He crossed the room and then turned back—"I wouldn't go to-night, only I heard this afternoon that Rob is ill."

"Oh, go, by all means," she cried, hastily, "and, Laurie, ask Janet when Edna is coming. If she could come over here evenings and sing it would amuse you, and I know Edna could ride Flora. She is not afraid of horses and she loves to walk. It is awfully stupid for you. I was afraid it would be," she continued rising and putting her arms around his neck, as he stood by the door. He kissed her and strode downstairs with the first feeling of remorse that he had entertained for days. The world considered him a model husband, and for months he had been ready to endorse the world's opinion, but Milly's last words had thrown an unpleasant light upon his present moody restlessness, and even cast a glare of objectionable explanation upon his former eagerness to get home again. It was not Randlemeade that he had craved to see, it was a pair of the bluest, the merriest, the loveliest eyes in the wide world. It was not a longing to settle down and work that had sent him back to his native land, but a desire to learn for himself what the owner of these blue eyes was doing, and upon whom she was shedding her smiles and her daring, mischievous, almost insolent, but adorable little overtures of friendliness and warfare.

The sun had set and the long June twilight was drawing to a close as he sauntered up the drive before his brother's house. The tree and vines deepened the shadows around the veranda, but he perceived that the front door was open and that some one was occupying

one of the rockers. Deciding that this figure belonged to his sister-in-law, he called out—

“Glad to see you off duty. I——” but the words died on his lips, as the figure rose and he noted that it wanted an inch or two of Janet’s height.

“Ah,—you?” he managed to say, bounding up the steps. “When—when did you come?”

“To-night. Aren’t you going to shake hands?”

He extended his arm limply. He was looking at her face, taking in the new beauty that the year had written there. Every curve, the sweep of her lashes, the arch of the delicate brows, the lips that were parted with a smile of undisguised amusement, the eyes so soft, so glowing, so uncertain; memory had treasured all, but memory had been cold and elusive, though he had kept it with him jealously.

“Have you finished?” she asked, with the smile he knew so well. “Have I improved? Are my ten new pounds of flesh and my twelve months’ happiness and peace clearly manifested?”

“Have you been happy?” he questioned, still standing.

“Supremely happy; but sit down. Neta is with brother Robert. I’ll send Kitty in a minute and tell them you are here.”

He forced himself to dwell on the fact that he had a brother and that this brother was ill. He inquired as he took a chair,

“What is the matter with Rob?”

“Nothing alarming. He was out all day Tuesday and it brought on a chill. Neta is in her element. She is petting him to her heart’s content, but as he is not ill enough to be angelic, I don’t envy her. I would as soon caress a Bengal tiger as a half-sick man.”

"I can't imagine you caressing any one," Laurie remarked, shortly.

"No? Oh, yes, I have a marked ability for that sort of thing at times. How is Milly?"

"She isn't well,—she is—she is tired."

"Indeed, of you?"

"Hardly. I meant physically tired. The heat has used her up. She is awfully anxious to see you. She was talking to-night about your coming over and sitting with us evenings. She seemed to think you would."

"Oh, yes, I'll come. The prospect is very alluring."

"You promise?"

"No, I won't promise. Once bound by a promise I am only actuated by a desire to break it."

"Where is Mainwaring?" he asked, abruptly.

"Arnold at present is tasting the joys of cow-boy life. He writes that he is a wild and fearless rider, a capital shot, a prime something or other else; but he has buried his briefs and is playing the part of a contrary son by way of variety, to his father's consternation and the ruination of his complexion."

"You write to him?"

"Yes."

"Is it all over between you?"

"There are a good many miles between us."

"There is more than that," he said, boldly. "He wouldn't be there and you here otherwise. If you are happy separated, you have me to thank for it."

"You,—oh you have made me very happy," she said, scornfully. "The chances are that I would never have been a person to emulate under any circumstances, but if I had never known you, I could have successfully

deceived some poor man into believing me an angel. Instead of tearing over a western plain, in danger of his life, he might have been here and I——”

“Oh, then, you admit that I was the cause of his going?”

“I don’t admit anything of the kind. Oh, Laurie, what a horrid man you are to talk to. I don’t know how Milly stands you. You have been here about three minutes and I have contradicted you already a dozen times. What is the use? You don’t know a single thing about Mr. Mainwaring or me either.”

“I thought you were trying to enlighten me. It sounded like it.”

“Well, I have no intention of enlightening you about anything.”

“Because, in spite of what you say, I do happen to be pretty well posted, but don’t let’s argue. Come, look at that stretch of moonlight out there. Come down the road a little way. Rob doesn’t know I am here. I’ll go up for a minute later. I know he is all right. Get your hat.”

He spoke persuasively and she was silent,—her eyes turned from him. When she looked up he saw that he had won.

“I haven’t had a walk for ages,” she said, half under her breath. “No one walks in Middletown. I don’t want a hat, this will do.”

She permitted him to wind a frail scarf of light blue wool about her head, and then they went down the steps together.

“Are you really going to stay at home now?” she asked, when they reached the road. “I should think you would be tired of travelling about.”

“I am tired of it,—I am tired of everything,—there

is no spot in the world as attractive to me as this, and there is no known corner of the world worse for me to stay in."

"You mean?"

"I need not tell you what I mean."

She dropped her eyes and increased the distance between them, as she said, hurriedly,—“No, no, I don't want to know. Isn't this lovely! Look how far you can see down that hill. Neta loves this view; she ought to see it now with the moonlight on it. I would like to be buried by moonlight.”

“I would rather live by moonlight,” he said, drawing her arm within his own. The house was some distance behind and hidden by a bend in the road. Her hand looked so white against his dark coat sleeve that he could not refrain from touching it.

“Laurie, don't do that; listen, I want to talk to you,” she began eagerly. “I have thought a great deal since you went away. I don't see why we can't be friends,—I love her so much. You can forget the past,—forget what you said. I can. It would be dreadful if I was always to be afraid of,—of your saying something. There would be no peace. I don't always want to run, if I chance to meet you alone. Don't you know what I mean?”

“Yes,” he said, in a low tone, “I know what you mean.”

“Well, then, won't you? Then I'll come over to the house and we will all be happy. There is no reason why we shouldn't be.”

“No reason at all,” he put in, grimly.

“You see that I was right,” she went on. “She is just the woman for you. You are fond of her, you must be.”

"Yes, I am fond of her."

"And you are glad now?"

"Oh, very glad. My life is a most enviable one, but no one can say that I haven't made her happy."

"Yes, yes, I knew you would. . Nothing else really matters. She thinks you are perfect; don't let her ever change her mind. Life at best is so short. When you are old and ready to die it will be lovely to look back and think what you have done for her. She would never have loved any one else; she would have been a darling little old maid and kept your picture to cry over alone and waste away and die years before she ought to. Oh, it is dreadful never to be able to love but once! It is frightful to think of building so much on one man, and a man like you."

"Thanks," he interjected, with hot resentment.

"I mean it, Laurie. There is nothing noble about you. You are terribly selfish. You wouldn't give up anything for anybody, even if you loved. I know you wouldn't, but Milly doesn't realize that. I was sure she never would. Let's go back now, I am tired."

"Not yet," he urged. "Tell me about yourself. Did you speak the truth when you said you were happy? I can't tell by your face. Selfish as you say I am, I would like to be sure of your peace. I would like to know what you intend to do with that fellow out west."

"I don't intend to do anything with him."

"On your honor?"

"Yes, for a while."

"Will you tell me when you make a definite decision?"

"Why?"

"Because I must know," he said, with unguarded

warmth. "His very name is a nightmare. Let things be as they are. I wouldn't offend your sense of what is proper, I swear it, but don't put an end to our friendship by dragging him in. You don't want him. You are young. You can wait years before you settle your life. You will be happier free. Let this night be the commencement of a new order of things. God knows I need a little pity, a little happiness, I won't presume on it,—you can trust me."

Even in the moonlight she could see how pale his face had become. His voice was like music. She listened, entranced, as he went on with his plans for what they would do in the future. She lost her nervous fear. The thought of Milly's prior claim faded away. All the loneliness of the last year passed before her. She drew a deep breath of happiness. They had both resolved to bury the past and were never going to forget again that fate had marked them out to be friends and nothing more. It would be very easy to remember, she assured herself. He told her of the yacht he meant to buy. He hazarded Milly's suggestion about her riding his bay mare Flora. He heard her agree to this arrangement with unfeigned delight, and his eloquence increased. He lamented his own folly in remaining away so long when matters could have been thus amicably adjusted months before. He watched her face bathed in the soft light, her lips tremulous, her eyes full of pleasure. He steadied his voice and fought hard to temper his glances to the required degree of sober good-will and friendliness, but he knew that he was seeking to have her ratify a compact fraught with awful danger for them both. The hands of his watch pointed to half-past nine before they turned to retrace their steps.

"They will certainly have missed me," she said in alarm. "Look, who is that, Laurie? It is Neal. I would rather have met any one in the world but Neal."

"Neal isn't your guardian," returned her companion, but he shared her regret at the encounter, and with scant cordiality they joined the man who stood waiting for them at the gate.

Neal glanced at his cousin curiously, then extended his hand to Edna who looked up at him with a smile somewhat sweeter than it was her wont to waste on Neal.

"I've come home to the bosom of my family and find its chief member ill," she said, lightly, as they started up the drive. She didn't allude to her saunter in the moonlight, and when they entered the house Neal permitted Janet to infer that Laurie had just arrived with him.

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## CHAPTER XXIV.

WHATEVER June had provided in the matter of heat and discomfort, July surpassed. Milly's interest was divided between the studio, where Laurie now spent the majority of his mornings, and the hammock on the lawn. This spot was certain to offer a breeze if such a luxury was obtainable anywhere, and here she took her sewing or her book and whiled away long hours. Edna ran over very often. Milly felt that she had never known her friend to be as gay as she was this summer. Even Laurie appeared to have caught her spirit, and all animosity between the two had fled. Milly looked on with delight. There were no more taunting speeches,



no more derisive laughter, nothing but smiles and good nature and wonderful willingness to oblige, whether it was a song that he wanted or her company on a morning gallop.

Milly never objected to being left alone. She was so unfeignedly thankful to perceive that her husband was growing contented to remain at home. She laughed in amusement one day when Miss Penelope grimly intimated that people would say he was neglecting her for Edna Morvick. Her aunt's innuendoes carried no force. She had always put the thought of his enjoyment above her own. Edna amused and diverted him when she could not. She loved and trusted her friend, and believed in Laurie's love for herself, as she believed in her God. Gossip could not penetrate a shield like this. There was no weak spot in the armor of her innocent trust. Even jealousy passed her by. There were times when Edna almost frightened her by the violence of her demonstrations of affection. Moments when she would fling her arms around Milly's neck and murmur such fond, such foolish words of passionate tenderness and then flee from the room not to reappear for hours; but this was Edna's way. She had never been like any one that Milly had ever known. That which would have been rude and eccentric in most people, was in Edna only an added charm. Laurie had long since accorded to his wife permission to care for his studio and keep out all vandals in the shape of awkward maids. It afforded her exquisite delight to handle and dust his beautiful things, and since the hot weather had set in it had become her custom to perform this task before breakfast. Indeed Laurie was frequently not awake when she would steal away and finish her duties with the clanging of the rising bell.

Opening the door softly one morning she felt a rush of air on her face accompanied by a sudden commotion and the sound of hurrying steps. Advancing into the room she caught her breath and looked with startled eyes into the white face of Ezra Felton, standing near a window that was partly raised.

"Do—do you want anything? Mr. Cameron is not up yet," she tried to say, but the boy did not speak. Keeping his glittering eyes fixed on hers, he backed nearer and nearer the window. She attempted once more to ask him what he wanted, but her tongue refused to move, and in another moment he had vanished. She was very much frightened, but she determined not to disturb her husband. The boy was crazy and the window had been left open. He was given to prowling. She remembered having heard of his doing something like this before. It really did not signify anything, only she began to wish with all her heart that he might be better cared for and put out of the way of indulging in these alarming propensities. She forced herself to slight nothing in her work, but was very glad to escape to her own room and know that she was not alone. Laurie opened his eyes lazily as she entered.

"What is the matter; have you seen a ghost?" he inquired.

"Yes, a live ghost. Laurie, that awful boy got into the studio again."

"Who, young Felton? How?"

"The window was open. You must have left it open when you took Edna in there last night to show her those sketches. He went out quickly. I don't think he meant to take anything, but he certainly is not a pleasant person to come upon suddenly."

"Assuredly not, the young rascal! My respected

parent will permit him to run at large. Some day he will burn the roof over our heads."

Her face at this prediction became so pale that he instantly repented his rashness and strove to allay her fears, but the memory of her fright was not easily banished.

There was a round of gayety during August. Laurie had brought his yacht and merry parties were gathered together on the little craft. Milly was gaining strength slowly under the influence of a powerful tonic, but Laurie developed a great deal of solicitude about her health and decidedly objected to her doing anything that might overtax her strength. Long walks or drives were among the forbidden recreations, but she was permitted to spend a great deal of time with Aunt Penelope. Her life was full of tranquillity. Her husband was very kind to her and rarely gave way to his temper now. She often lamented that she did not see more of him, but she loved to dwell on the fact that he was enjoying himself and she had great hopes of his new picture.

Walking through the woods one morning on her way from Miss Penelope's, she was surprised to encounter Kate Felton.

"Oh," she said, kindly, "I am very glad to see you." Then she hesitated, for Kathie stood stolidly before her, with no answering gleam of pleasure on her dark, handsome face.

"I hope you are going to remain," ventured Milly, but the girl shook her head.

"No," she said, briefly, "I only came home to see my father. I am going back."

"Are you living far from here?"

"Middletown. I work there."

"Oh, your brother is very happy now, I suppose."

A smile broke the severity of Kathie's expression, but she said nothing and Milly continued :

"Your little sister, Kate, is running very wild. I have thought lately that I would like to do something for her. I have so much unoccupied time. I could spend an hour in the morning for lessons. I will speak to my husband about it."

"No," burst forth her listener, suddenly. "Thank you all the same, but I am going to fix Teenie. She is a perfect little rat, but"—she added proudly—"I am working for something. I am going to send her to school. I am going to get her away from ma. Father knows. You are kind. I thank you for thinking of us, but——"

Milly smiled. "You are very proud," she said, gathering up her skirts, "but I am glad you realize Teenie's need. You are brave too. I don't think I could be as brave. I hope you will succeed."

She told Laurie of this conversation when she reached the studio, and he agreed that Kathie's intentions were praiseworthy, but he had small faith in any one being able to materially improve Teenie.

It was not a week after her meeting with Kathie that Milly discovered the subject of their remark industriously engaged in constructing a huge mud pie in the road that ran to the stable. A mass of tangled black curls shaded her eyes. She looked like a little dark-skinned Arab in her tattered red dress.

"Teenie, don't you like to look at pictures?" was Milly's first insinuating advance.

The grimy fingers relinquished their hold of the stone. The hair was flung back and the lips opened to emit an emphatic, "I does, black ones."

"Well, I have some nice black ones, and I will get

a pair of scissors and you shall cut them out if you want to."

This invitation was promptly acted upon and jumping up from the road she rubbed her hands on her apron.

"Oh, run home and wash your hands first. I will wait for you here."

"Shall I put on my silk dress? I got a new one; blue silk. Kate brought it."

"Oh, never mind the dress. I'm going to take you to the orchard over there. You would soil a new dress." In five minutes the child returned, the better for a vigorous splashing in a basin of water, and then Milly, true to her promise, departed for the pictures and the scissors. She selected a tree under which a swing had been hung for the gardener's children, and, provided with a bit of needlework, prepared to enjoy Teenie's enjoyment to the full. For half an hour or more the child cut and slashed and was silent save to give voice to an occasional question which no mortal could answer. Her scissors, however, were finally dropped and she grew loquacious.

"Kate's home. She got home Friday. I don't want her to stay. Ma don't want her to stay."

"Oh, Teenie, that is wrong."

"I don't care," she persisted. "I told ma something last night and Kate slapped me; then she gave me five cents not to tell. I spent the five cents and I don't care. Ma says I'm too big to be slapped. I did see him, and I saw her. Ma says he ought to be hung, and Kate says she pities you awful."

"Teenie, you must not say such things," corrected Milly again, counting the petals of a daisy she was fashioning.

"Yes, but I like you. Kate likes you, too. Kate says you are good and the other one's bad. I don't like her."

"Don't like who, Teenie?"

"Miss Morvick."

"Oh, but you should not say so. You don't know Miss Morvick."

"Yes, I do. Ma says hanging would be too good for her."

Millie opened her eyes. Surely Laurie was right; this was a most extraordinary child.

"It was yesterday afternoon," continued that shrill little voice. "He was on a black horse and hers was brown and nice. She looked awful pretty, but ma says it is only skin deep. They got off, back of Fowler's, to get some goldenrod. Ezra and me was after berries. I hid in the bushes,—Ezra hides,—it's fun,—and I saw him,—Ezra saw him too. He kissed her, and she cried and said she was going——"

But Teenie's volubility received a sudden check. Her companion had her by the shoulders. The pictures in her lap were scattered and fluttered to the ground. She wriggled herself free, and was about to laugh gleefully when she caught a glimpse of the face above her. Something that she read there killed her merriment, and she was about to cry, when a final and less familiar emotion, surprise, kept her silent.

"Teenie, that—that was not a pretty story. It is wicked to tell things that are not true. You can take the pictures and the scissors. Perhaps you would like to finish your pie."

But pie-making had lost its charm. Teenie was cunning enough to realize that Kate had had a motive in giving her the five cents not to tattle. She was glow-

ing with the importance of the information she was able to impart and determined to establish its truth in Milly's mind.

"'Twasn't a story," she insisted. "I see'd them. I was close up. He kissed her lots. I heard him talk, —Ezra heard him."

"Never mind! You had better go. I—I am going into the house. The sun is warm." She folded her work carefully. There was a strange humming in her ears; her thimble rolled to the ground; she picked it up, while she remembered that there were nine petals on the white daisy. She must not forget the number—nine. She saw the child's impish face, a little frightened now, with its great, round, black eyes staring at her blankly.

"Children are not responsible for their speeches," she thought. "Children tell such odd things."

She felt that she did not understand their peculiarities, and persistence proved to be one that she had never taken note of heretofore. It seemed to her hours before she could induce Teenie to depart; hours before she reached the seclusion of her room, out of the glare of the sun. Throwing herself on the couch, she tried to collect her wandering thoughts and focus them on one subject, but they kept veering off in the strangest manner. A beautiful wrought silver bowl on the table reminded her of a day in Paris, months back, when Laurie had brought it to her after a sketching tour in Brittany. She remembered what he had said on that occasion, how handsome he had looked, and how delighted she had been to see him. From the silver bowl her eyes strayed to a companion vase bearing a huge bunch of goldenrod. Rising hurriedly, she seized the flowers and bore them swiftly to the open window, where

she paused, holding their wet stems tightly in her hand. Edna had gathered them for her on the previous afternoon. She thought how the girl had rushed in here and tossed them in her lap. She thought of that lovely face so full of animation, those beautiful eyes that always seemed to follow her with loving interest. Oh ! It had been the maddest, craziest fabrication that she had just listened to in the orchard. Teenie's dreadful words rushed over her afresh. Her cheeks began to burn and her fingers trembled as she attempted to replace the flowers. But she was not stunned now—she could think and scout Teenie's intelligence as nonsense. A sense of bitter degradation fell upon her, because she had permitted that babbling little tongue to voice such blasphemy.

Sitting on the edge of the couch, she tried to decide what was best to do. First she determined not to mention the matter to Laurie. Laurie had always charged her impressively never to give heed to or repeat mere gossip. Edna, of course, was the one she must advise. She would not give Teenie's story in detail, but she would divulge enough to rouse her friend to the certainty that people were becoming most unkind in their remarks. Miss Penelope had been right ; girls as pretty as Edna could not be too careful. Laurie was very careless. Milly remembered how often he had declared that he cared nothing for conventionalities. But Edna would care when she came to realize what a formidable thing it was to set consideration of these forms wholly aside. Further deliberation was unnecessary. She would go over to her friend's at once. Laurie had gone to Norwood ; there was no likelihood of his returning before the middle of the afternoon and she could be back before that time.



As she walked along the dusty road a few minutes later, she tried to choose the words that she meant to use. Stripping Teenie's prattle of its insulting statements and narrowing her argument down to a few generalities, in which Miss Penelope's opinion must also figure, she passed the Felton cottage, and had turned into a cross-street when a familiar yellow buck-board came into sight, drawn by Laurie's horse and driven by Laurie himself. The color rushed over her face as she noted that Edna sat beside him. They were driving quickly toward her, but for a moment neither observed her standing by the roadside. Suddenly, with a sharp exclamation, Laurie drew the animal hastily back on his haunches.

"Great Scott! Are you courting a sun-stroke? Where are you going?"

"Over to Edna's," she replied, glancing at that young woman's crimsoning cheeks. "I—I didn't know she went with you. I will go back."

But Edna had sprung from the wagon with remarkable agility, before Laurie could interfere or assist. "I will walk the rest of the way," she said, hurriedly. "I met Laurie in Norwood. I was going to the house, so I rode over. Take my place! you look tired. The sun is dreadful."

Milly stubbornly refused to act upon this suggestion, but the question was finally compromised by rigging a seat for her in the rear, and in that order they started for home. Edna lunched with them, and it was quite three o'clock before Laurie took himself off to the studio and gave Milly the opportunity for which she longed. Once alone with her friend, however, she found it curiously hard to use her opportunity. Edna lay curled up on the couch in a favorite position of

hers. Her hair shone like gold against the black cushion under her head. Her expression was very serious. Her thoughts evidently far away.

Milly watched her for a moment in silence. All her prearranged advice fled and left her in helpless uncertainty as to how she ought to begin, until her gaze fell on the vase of goldenrod, and she asked abruptly, "Edna, where did you gather that goldenrod yesterday?"

"Goldenrod, yesterday?" There was a slight tremor in the tone and the cushion received a violent jerk. "I got it in a field. Laurie was taking a stone out of Flora's foot. I don't know where I got it. Why?"

"I wanted to know—I wanted to know where you rode yesterday. People are talking, dear. They say you and Laurie are—are——" She faltered and broke down.

"Tell me what do they say," demanded Edna, breathlessly. "Do they come to you with stories?"

"Yes. They—I mean one person has. But—but she was only a child, Edna, and an awful child—no one believes a child. But I want to tell you—I have been so glad all summer that you had grown to like him. You have been nice to him. But I don't want people to—to criticise. You will be careful. Aunt Penelope says there are a number of families around here who spend their time gossiping. They don't understand, you see, that I can't ride, and they see you so much on Flora, and—and——"

"I will never ride Flora again. I—I hate riding," cried the girl, starting up from the couch. "I knew I would. Don't mind people. I won't go out again with him alone. I will go away. I want to go away. I hate this place—I will——"

"Oh, Edna, no. Don't get angry—and don't tell him. I shall not. Men hate gossip. It will be all right. You are too sensitive. Don't cry—he will notice, and be annoyed."

"Let him be annoyed," she exclaimed angrily, dashing the tears from her eyes. "Nothing must ever hurt him, in your opinion. I would hurt him—I would *like* to hurt him. There—there,—Milly, I won't. Don't—don't, I am going—I am—my head aches."

She shrank from her friend's detaining grasp. No amount of entreaties prevailed to alter her determination and Milly was finally forced to let her go.

There was the tiniest rift in the lute and the music of Milly's daily life had lost a shade of its sweetness. Her confidence was still undisturbed, but things could never again be just as they had been. She developed a nervous horror of what people might say. She lost her love of going over to Miss Penelope's. She stood in constant fear of her aunt's advice and became instantly constrained and silent when Laurie's name was spoken in Miss Penelope's presence. Laurie's temper also underwent a change. The simplest occurrence upset him. He revived all his old assertions as to the undesirable features of the place as a permanent residence. He began to talk of settling in California, or, more wildly still, mentioned a wish to go round the world. Edna kept away from them for days. The pleasant little dinners which they had been wont to have served in their own rooms, in which Edna had so often joined them, were pleasures of the past. There were no more long evenings on the veranda when Edna would bring her guitar and play a soft accompaniment to Laurie's college songs. The evenings were dreary now in comparison. Laurie often rode after sunset and

Milly would sit alone, watching and waiting and thinking. Very often her eyes would fill with tears of loneliness, and she would wonder what it could be that oppressed her. She was beginning to realize that her husband was not happy. His restlessness disturbed her inordinately. She could find no cause for it. Once or twice the awful possibility that he might be getting tired of her obtruded itself and made her face blanch, but she put the thought away as though it were an insult to him. She had accepted his love as a certainty long ago, and she was not one of those women who require to have this fact kept before them by constant repetition in so many words. Marriage with her was very sacred; and the idea that a man could look and act and speak without the deepest sanction of his heart in a matter of such importance was a possibility that she had never considered. Still, at times, in her hours alone, the question would rise in her mind as to whether he loved her as she had thought in the earlier months of their married life.

One evening, when this thought had been especially prominent in her mind, bringing with it a gloom and sadness which she strove unavailingly to throw off, Laurie entered the room and noted her pallor.

"Are you ill?" he inquired, impatient at the steadfastness of her gaze. "I am going to New York to-night, and if Brown's medicine isn't going to build you up, I shall bring out some one who can help you."

"I'm not ill, Laurie. I don't need any medicine. When—when are you going?"

"To-night, on the express. I just met Edna in Norwood. She will come over and stay with you—she promised. Are you coming down?"

"No, I am not hungry. Please excuse me. I am going to take a nap ; will you lower the shades ?"

"You are sure you are satisfied with Brown ?"

"Perfectly satisfied."

"Don't you want me to bathe your head ?"

"No—no, thank you," she said, hurriedly, feeling that she would certainly lose her self-possession if he touched her. "Don't keep them waiting, Laurie, the bell has rung."

"I will be back then, shortly," he said, crossing the room, but for hours he could not get her face out of his mind.

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## CHAPTER XXV.

SEVERAL times during the summer, Neal had sought to awaken Janet to a sense of Edna's lack of discretion, but as he could not bring himself to come out bluntly with his fears, half-way measures had not achieved his purpose.

One evening, however, he had made a remark that caused Janet to question her sister, with a view to finding out what Neal had referred to as "the girl's withheld confidences."

"The months are flying by. What are you going to do with Arnold ?" she said.

"Do with him, my dear Neta ? You speak as though he were a mortgage coming due. He is doing for himself. He is contented. It is astonishing the amount of sympathy people waste on him. I didn't send him out there, neither do I prevent his return." She spoke with some irritation, and avoided her sister's glance.

"I am sure," went on Janet, slowly, "I wish you

were married. I was so satisfied and easy about you with him. I thought you cared, too. I never knew what happened. I never knew why you changed, and you are changed. You have changed a great deal this summer. People have remarked it. You are a little reckless and a little careless of appearances. That is unlike you. Gossip is most offensive to me and it must be equally so to you."

"Of course Neal has been talking to you," remarked the girl, with a light laugh. "Poor Neal! No wonder he is getting old. So he has even taken me under his sheltering wing with all his other responsibilities."

Janet colored but did not desist. "I don't think you are as thoughtful of Milly as you were once," she said. "She is certainly left a great deal alone. The families, of course, are closely connected, and you have known Laurie all your life, but he is a handsome man and a married man. You don't want him to forget his obligations through you."

"I don't want him to forget anything. Oh, Neta, what nonsense! You shut yourself up here like a fossil. Neal's croaking sounds very formidable to you. Don't trouble about me, and don't think for an instant I am not just as fond of Milly. I am too fond of her, and I am happy. You,—you don't want me to marry and go away. People are often unhappy when they marry. I know I would be. I want to stay with you always. Don't let Neal frighten you. I won't do anything to worry you. Kiss me." She lifted her face and for an instant let it rest on Janet's shoulder. In a vague way Janet felt there was something gone from her expression, but no amount of pleading could bring any secret grief to the surface. "I am perfectly well, and, generally speaking, per-

fectly happy. Don't get fidgetty, Neta. Now I must dress. I am going to stay with Milly to-night, her liege lord is going to the city. Come, the inquest is over. Let me see you look pleasant."

But Janet had no smile at her command. She thought of Edna frequently during the remainder of the afternoon, and her conscience began to trouble her because she had allowed her own fears to usurp so much of her attention. She had not been watchful enough or sympathetic enough, but she meant to be on the alert hereafter and seek diligently to get at the unseen foe warring against her sister's peace. In spite of what Neal had said, she did not connect her brother-in-law with the trouble, whatever it was. She had very little confidence in him, but it needed more than Neal's few blundering words to disturb her faith in Edna.

The hours dragged heavily. She did not expect Robert until the eleven o'clock train. He meant to stay in town and meet a man on business in the evening and she would have to dine without him. She always dreaded the solitary dinner with her father, and to-night he was even more querulous than usual. She listened to his whining voice without comment, and was heartily relieved when the time came for him to take his after-dinner nap. She did not care to sew, and she did not want to read, so she drew her chair before the open window and sat in the twilight. She thought every step she heard must be Neal's, but ten o'clock sounded and she was still alone.

The air grew oppressively close, not a breath stirred the leaves on the trees outside. She went to the door and then hastily recoiled, for a glare of lightning had illuminated the hall. A shower was coming and Rob-

ert's train was almost due. She called to Kitty to ask if the man had been ordered to go to the station. Kitty thought not, for he had gone off immediately after dinner. Peals of thunder could be heard, growing in force and frequency. Her father awoke, and she led him up to his room; then returning to the sitting-room sat down by the window to wait. The lightning played around her, but her fear of it seemed gone. The rain poured in torrents. She lowered the shade at last and lighted the lamp. The train was past due. She watched the clock for some minutes and listened intently. He would get a carriage. Surely he would never walk over in the storm. But time rushed by and she could hear nothing but the occasional faint rumbling of distant thunder and the gentle pattering of the rain. She grew sick and faint with anxiety, for she knew that there was no other train. At length a terrible presentiment of evil fell upon her, which, try as she would, could not be reasoned away. Instantly her thoughts flew to Neal. She would go for Neal. Neal would help her. Neal would find him. She could not stand here any longer and watch the minutes as they crept along.

Rushing to her room, she seized a shawl and paused outside her father's door for an instant to listen for any sound that would indicate that he was still awake, then, without further hesitation, she left the house and started along the road towards Miss Penelope's.

It was intensely dark. The shower was over, but the heavens were full of heavy rolling clouds. It was impossible to avoid the pools of water in the path, but she had but one object and that was to reach Neal. She could not collect her own ideas; she could not define the fear that was benumbing her courage; she only felt that something had happened to Robert.



"I will never try him again, never again," she kept repeating to herself. "I will be patient, oh Robert, I will be patient. I won't expect so—so much."

She was out of breath and her lips were ashen when she reached her destination, but her heart gave a throb of joy as she perceived a light burning in Neal's room.

She would not disturb and alarm Miss Penelope. She would knock on Neal's window and then they would go for Robert together. Pushing nearer through the wet shrubbery, she steadied her footing and knocked gently on the glass, once, twice, before the shade and sash were raised and Neal's astonished face looked down upon her.

"Neal, it is I, Janet. Oh, Neal! Robert has not come home. It is very late and the train is in. I——"

"You have come over here alone," he cried, hastily. "Wait until I open the door."

"No, no, I won't go in, Neal. Oh, Neal, get your hat, please; something has happened, more—more than the ordinary failure. I feel it. Come with me. You will know what to do and where to go. You always do. Don't delay, hurry."

He disappeared for an instant, and then, hat in hand, leaped through the open window and stood at her side.

"What do you fear?" he asked, under his breath. "If the train is in and he has not come, he has probably remained in town."

"No, no," she protested, "he wouldn't do that; there would be no way to get home and he—he never stayed all night. Oh, Neal, we—we were happier lately, weren't we? And now—but come."

"I wish," he urged, gently, "I wish you would stay

here in my room. If, as you say, he came on that train, there is but one place where he would stop. You don't want to go in there?"

"No, I won't go in," she returned, brokenly. "I will wait outside, but not here."

Realizing that she was suffering the agony of suspense, he offered no further objection and they turned their steps towards the gate.

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## CHAPTER XXVI.

It was far from being a happy trio that had gathered around Milly's small table for dinner earlier that night. Milly's face had haunted Edna all the afternoon. She had tried in vain to talk, but every topic met with slight response. She bathed her friend's head and sat close to the couch, holding Milly's little cold hands, longing to bring the old gladness back to those sweet eyes which were watching her with such puzzled bewilderment. Oh, God! did she suspect? It was impossible to eat or be cheerful with a question like this surging to and fro in her mind. Laurie himself at last relapsed into moody silence. He was angry with Milly for sitting there so still and looking like a ghost. He was angry with Edna for her short answers. He felt uncomfortable and ill at ease, and consulted his watch frequently to see if it was not time to go for his train.

Under the pretext of seeking a book, Edna beat a hasty retreat to the room below when the moment came for him to take leave of his wife; and thus, freed from restraint, his impatience became visible.

Milly started to her feet as Edna disappeared.

"You,—you are ready?" she faltered.

"Yes, my grip is downstairs. Well, Milly, for a certainty, you are consulting with a legion of blue devils to-night. What ails you? If you are honestly ill, I won't go."

"No, no, Laurie, there is nothing the matter. I wouldn't have you stay. Edna will read to me by-and-by. I am nervous. You—you will be back to-morrow?"

"Yes."

She crept nearer. "I am foolish," she whispered, "but accidents often happen, when one travels. Sit here with me, just a moment as you used to. I have tried so hard, dear, to do all that a wife ought to—remember that always, won't you? Remember I always realized how very ordinary and—and dull I was most of the time. I——" but she paused, for he had sunk into a big chair and drawing her down on his lap was trying to laugh away her words.

"My dear child, are you losing your mind? Is your vivid fancy picturing my being hurled over an embankment? You are morbid, and as for calling you ordinary, no one could live with you and think that. Come, cheer up, go to bed and to sleep early, won't you? I don't want to find such white cheeks to-morrow. We will try Brown a little longer, and if he can't bring your roses back, we will find some one that can. Don't go down with me. You are tired. I will send Edna right up."

She put her arms around his neck and lay very still for a moment with her face hidden on his shoulder, then he gently lifted her to her feet and kissed her. She saw him cross the room. Her lips moved to say good-bye, but he caught no sound,

Gaining the lower hall, he inquired of a servant if the Captain had returned from Norwood, and receiving a negative answer, entered the library softly and approached the white-robed figure standing so motionless by the table. The hot blood rushed to her face when she saw him.

"I thought you had gone."

"Without saying good-night?" he said, reproachfully.

"Good-night. It will be a dreadful night. It will kill me. Oh, Laurie, she suspects something. I feel it. I know it."

"Do you? Well, the end is near, then," he said, bitterly. "Do you think I can go on in this way? No one but a woman would expect it. One word, darling, one word and this harassing business will be over. It is sheer madness to stand off now, and you know it. We are hypocrites here. *I am living a lie and so are you.*"

The look of horror on her face silenced him instantly. He followed the direction of her terror-stricken eyes until his gaze rested on Milly, standing just inside the curtains, which she was grasping as though to save herself from falling.

"I—I thought I heard the front door close," she began, drawing nearer and clutching the back of a chair for support. "I—I didn't mean to listen, but I knew, —I knew to-day. Your train, Laurie—you will surely miss it. James is waiting."

"I needn't go," he put in, hoarsely.

"Oh, yes. Go, please—please go. There is nothing to do—nothing to say. You have an appointment—hurry."

He glanced appealingly at Edna, "Go," she whis-

pered. "Go, go, go," and he rushed from the room and left them alone.

For almost a minute they stood there, then Edna seized the book she had taken from the shelf and cried hysterically: "Come up to your room. I want to talk to you. I want to tell you. Oh, Milly—don't kill me by being so still. I wish you would scream, darling, I wish you would."

Her knees shook violently as she mounted the stairs slowly behind her friend. Once in Milly's apartment she grew feverishly eager to do something for Milly. She arranged the pillows on the couch and brought a light robe for her feet, then, placing a shade over the light, she fell on the floor by her side in a phrenzy of grief.

"Can't you say a word—not a single word? Oh, Milly, if you would only speak to me! It—it is not natural to be so calm—it will hurt you. Oh, I know it sounded dreadful—but, but you didn't understand it all. People have talked, but they will forget. He must take you away. You will be happy. He—he is a flirt. You always knew that, didn't you, dear? But it don't signify anything. Let me tell you how it was. I will tell you everything—everything. Oh, Milly, I would die here now to help you. You are shocked, but you don't suffer as I do." She buried her head on the edge of the couch and flung her arms across the slight figure lying there so quietly.

"Edna, look up. I am not stunned. I am only thinking. I am glad I went downstairs; yes, yes, I am. It was wrong to listen, but I couldn't seem to speak for a minute. You see, dear, it is best to know these things. Others knew. Several weeks ago Teenie Felton——"

"Teenie Felton!" cried Edna, vehemently; "I will kill her. How dared she!"

"Wait, the child was not to blame. She—she saw you one day. She told it at home and they tried to get her not to tell me. I didn't believe her. I couldn't all at once. Don't you remember I spoke to you about it, or, at least, asked you about your ride one day? Then Aunt Penelope used to advise me and make strange remarks, but I did not understand. I knew, however, after a while, that he was unhappy. I couldn't think why, but it troubled me. I didn't know what to do. It is very hard to know what to do, because we are married. I don't want you to tell me anything about it; I will always believe that you didn't mean to—to let him. I will always believe that, but, Edna, it wasn't before we came back from Europe. He did care for me first, didn't he? It,—it wasn't the money? I don't think I could bear that."

"The money? No, no," cried the girl, eagerly. "Oh, Milly, it will be all right. I tell you it will. A mere fancy doesn't count. Oh, try and believe it. He will take you away for a change. To-morrow, when he comes back, you will talk to him."

"To-morrow," repeated Milly, slowly, "he—he has gone, then? My head is queer, but I will remember, I will remember it all after awhile. Edna, do you see those mermaids there on the clock? They have such ugly little grinning faces. Will you cover them up? That was Neal's wedding present. How long ago it seems. There is a scarf—I—I am silly, I know."

Edna rose to do her bidding. Milly demurred as she was about to resume her place on the floor.

"Sit here, dear, there is room."

"I don't want to; oh, Milly, I don't want to get off

the floor. I wish I could think of something to say to convince you. I wish now he had not gone. I wish he hadn't left you. Men are such cowards, such awful cowards. Does your head ache? Are you cold?"

"No, I am not cold. I think I will go to bed. I will fix the east room for you."

"You mustn't stay alone."

"I would rather."

"You will not sleep."

"Yes, see, I am calm." She sat up as she spoke. "It is cooler in the other room. You don't mind if I go?"

"Mind? No, but tell me, tell me, you will believe what he says to-morrow. You will go with him. You, —you, oh, if you don't, I shall want to die. I can't live and have you feel like this; I can't, I can't, I won't!" she sobbed, burying her face in her companion's lap. It was some minutes before she was able to rise and help her friend undress. She begged permission to lie there on the couch and be within call, but Milly insisted that she would require nothing. It would be best to go to her own room, close the door, and try to sleep. Sleep! Could she ever sleep again, she wondered, as she at last left Milly alone.

She did not want a light, but she threw open the window and sat down in the darkness to think. Must she always see that face? Those bewildered eyes? Those quivering lips? Must she always hear that voice, so low, so deadly calm, so hopeless? She would rather die; she would far rather die; life held only misery for her now,—the misery of remorse; the misery of a heart-felt longing to undo the past. She pressed her hands together and leaned her head back. Again the scalding tears rolled down her cheeks but she dashed them away.

"I will see him first. I will make him promise. She will forgive him. Oh, how I hate him! Oh, I am so glad I hate him! Oh, God! make me hate him."

As though in answer to her fierce words a glare of light enveloped her. She started with a gasp of fear and covered her eyes, but those flashes were not to be shut out, and she remained at last, fascinated.

There were moments when she could see far across the lawn; see the twisting, bending branches of the trees; see the terrible downpour of rain, and then the densest blackness would envelop everything.

Perhaps God sent this storm to kill her. The window was open. She was right in its path, but she did not wish to save herself. She did not move, although the rain beat in and her sight was almost blinded. It seemed to her that she sat there for hours, stiff and cramped, too miserable to feel her discomfort. At last the thunder grew less frequent and the lightning fainter. She put her hand on the window-sill and discovered that the rain had ceased. She wondered if Milly was asleep, and longed to go and see, but for some minutes she could not bring herself to make the effort. Finally, however, she opened the door. The light was still burning dimly in the room beyond and the curtain was partially drawn as she had left it. She stood still and listened until she fancied she heard the sound of soft, regular breathing, then she retreated again and for more than an hour kept her face to the window, wondering what the future would bring to them all; trying to plan something for Milly, trying to devise some scheme by which she could restore her friend's lost happiness. "He was everything to her," she pondered,— "her very life. He was a dream, a mad, wicked dream to me. She believed in him—I never did. She thought



he was the soul of honor—I knew he was the incarnation of selfishness, but he can make her think as before, in time. I will make him! If he don't go away, I will. I will write to Arnold. I will tell him to come and take me. I will tell him all. He will be good to me."

Once more the tears fell as she thought of her own wretchedness.

Milly was heart-broken, but Milly had done no wrong. Milly could sleep.

The place was very still. She fancied that it must be morning. It had been hours since she heard the Captain going along the hall to bed. Again she went to the door and listened. The light was certainly going out. Tiptoeing across the room, she brushed aside the curtain and cautiously looked in. The chair on which she remembered having placed Milly's clothes stood at the foot of the bed, but the clothes had been removed. She let go of the curtain and entered noiselessly, only to start back in alarm. Milly was not there! She immediately began a search, growing more and more frightened every minute. A single glance at the wardrobe told the story and brought on a chill of apprehension. The storm cloak which always hung in one particular place, a walking hat, together with various articles of clothing, as shown by little gaps here and there, were gone.

She ran to the reception-room on her way to summon the Captain and Miss Randle, then she paused—perhaps,—perhaps she had only gone to Miss Penelope's. At any rate the Captain would do nothing, and Miss Randle would only have an attack of hysterics. If Milly were not with her aunt, Neal and Miss Penelope were certainly the people to notify.

Without delay, and breathless with anxiety, she found

a wrap and stealing quietly downstairs let herself out by a side door. For some minutes she stumbled frequently until her eyes grew accustomed to the darkness, but she never faltered. Her thin shoes were speedily soaked, but she plunged on and was soon in the woods. Her brain was in a whirl. She was giddy with fright and almost oblivious of where she was till her foot touched some large obstruction stretched across the path. It was too dark to see. She dared not turn much aside lest she should lose her way in the brush, so stooping to feel the width of the obstacle that she might clear it, her hand came in contact with a man's hand.

With one long quivering scream of terror, she sprang up and on, falling two or three times before she reached the street, her heart beating nearly to suffocation, but no living form was in sight. Every house was darkened. She was incapable of speech by the time she reached Miss Penelope's gate. She heard footsteps, but she was not afraid of anything alive. She opened her lips and tried to call. She recognized Janet's voice—she heard Neal reply—then she rushed nearer and began an unintelligible burst of hysterical explanations.

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## CHAPTER XXVII.

"OH, Neal, didn't she come over here? She—she is gone and there is a man in the woods. I felt him. I felt his hand. I——" She paused and in another moment Neal caught her as she staggered forward, between them. Janet rubbed her hands and loosened

her collar, but it was impossible to understand what she was trying so pitifully to tell them. By degrees they brought her to the house, and Neal, still without speaking, let them in with his key. He understood the quick flash of appeal that shone in Janet's eyes, as he lighted the lamp in the sitting-room and stood for a moment by Edna's side as she lay on the sofa.

"I will go," he said, quickly, "but I must call Aunt Penelope first. This—this is strange news, Edna. Do you mean that Milly has left home at this hour of the night?"

The girl's face was very white and she shuddered.

"Yes—yes, Neal, if she isn't here, where is she? She went to bed. She isn't well, but I couldn't find her. Oh, go, please—please."

Janet sat down on the edge of the sofa. She had grown very calm after Edna described her encounter in the woods. In her own mind she was confident that it was Robert lying there. Moreover, there could be but one explanation of such a state of affairs, and her heart began to harden, and a tinge of bitterness animated her voice as she spoke. "Yes, Neal, go. I will wait here now. I will stay with Edna. Take—take him home and then come for us."

He did not reply, but her meaning was clear to him. Running up to Miss Penelope's door he called softly and explained the situation. In five minutes she appeared, utterly confounded by the intelligence, and followed him downstairs, where Edna was again questioned. But nothing could induce Miss Penelope to believe that Milly had gone off of her free will. She promptly signified an intention of going herself and clearing up the mystery. All attempts to dissuade her were unsuccessful. Neal was forced to wait until

she went for her bonnet and shawl. Janet crossed the room and whispered in a low tone,

"Take her around by the road, Neal, and then get his father. You couldn't do anything alone." He nodded. He looked so stern and grave. Probably, she thought, he was worrying about Milly. But it was strange she could not think of Milly. She could not think of anything but that prostrate form lying there in the woods. She knew that dull stupor so well. She could picture the expression on his face, the drooping chin, the heavy, half-closed eyes. She returned to Edna's side as the front door closed upon Neal and his companion. But she did not resume her seat for some minutes. She felt that her sister was suffering, but somehow, she knew no pity. She did not know why Edna should suffer.

"Neta—Neta," cried the girl. "You look so cold, so hard. If you don't love me—if you don't help me, who will? Oh, Neta, I have killed her. I sent her out in the storm. Perhaps she is in the woods somewhere too. I wanted the lightning to strike me, not her. I thought she was asleep and all the time she was in the storm. Oh, Neta, what shall I do? Oh, if Neal would only hurry. I wouldn't mind anything, if she would come back. I always wanted her to be happy. I always meant that she should be happy. I don't know how it happened, really I don't. I tried, yes, I did try. I always tried, till—till lately. Come here closer. Oh, Neta, you freeze me. Don't you care? Are you glad to know that I am being punished?"

"Care? Yes, I care," said Janet, in a tone that showed no emotion whatever. She sat down by her sister's side, but she did not offer to touch the hands that were flung so despairingly in her lap. "I think

you are grieving unnecessarily, however," she continued. "Milly will come back. She is very sure to come back."

"Perhaps, but think of the agony that must have sent her out of the house in the middle of the night. They will find her, yes, yes, but, Neta, I don't believe you understand. I don't believe you realize I did it. You look so queer."

"Yes, I understand. You shall tell me more tomorrow. I wish you would sleep. You are tired and you have been frightened. It was very foolish, though, to have been frightened. Shut your eyes. Don't talk. It is useless to talk. I feel, dear, I feel, only I am thinking and I am waiting for Neal."

Edna watched her as she rose abruptly and went over to the window. The room was quiet. Time passed, and still that tall form remained in its position by the window. Her head was turned in an attitude of listening. Her features had the appearance of chiseled marble against the background of the dark red curtains. Wearily and from sheer exhaustion Edna's eyes at length lost their steady gaze. Everything in the room grew indistinct. Janet seemed to tower to the ceiling and then she forgot her trouble.

Time is not measured by the steady and ceaseless ticking of our clocks alone. We meet some hours that hold sixty times sixty minutes. Every second leaves its mark upon our patience, and eats into the core of trembling hope.

Janet glanced at the sleeping form on the sofa with a vague sensation of relief. She was free now to mentally follow Neal on his errand. Oh, how long it took—what a distance they had to travel! She hoped that daylight would not dawn. Neal would not require

the light to direct him. She did not want the morning sun to shine on a certain face. She did not want even Neal to see so clearly the dreadful transformation. She prayed that God would stay the darkness. She shivered as she thought that it would always be night with her after this. Life would be a truly melancholy experience henceforth, for she knew that even Time, in spite of his mercy, could not again breathe new life into her dead trust.

A faint feeling rushed over her as her listening ear caught the sound of wheels, followed by light footfalls on the veranda. She leaned heavily on the back of the chair and waited. She heard Neal in the hall. She saw him enter. Then, for almost a moment, they stood, each studying the other's face, each struggling to speak. She was the first to recover the use of her tongue, and she stammered brokenly: "You are tired, poor Neal, but there was no one to go but you. There is no one to help me but you. I couldn't live without you. I am ready, but we must waken Edna."

"Not yet," he entreated, in a tone that sounded very harsh and discordant, "not yet. I want to tell you—I must explain. But, oh, God, where are the right words! Sit down here. It was Robert, Janet, it was Robert," he continued, forcing her to be seated.

"Yes," she said, calmly, "it was Robert, I knew that."

"But he is hurt, he is seriously hurt," he went on, pausing.

"Hurt, and you are keeping me from him. Oh, Neal, come."

She sprang up, but he seized her hands and held them firmly. Cold drops of perspiration broke out on his

forehead, his face was haggard, his speech thick and incoherent. "You must know,—try to understand. They sent me to tell you. We took him home. He was shot, Janet. Ezra Felton shot him. He—he—was—badly—shot. He—was—very—badly—shot." The awful word that he was struggling so hard to say stuck in his throat. He fondled her hands and looked at her with piteous entreaty, but there was no understanding written on her white face. After the first brief spasm of alarm had flitted across her features, the eyes that gazed into his were dully expressionless. She tried to get away from him.

"He—he is hurt. Oh, Neal, let me go, he wants me. He must wonder. He——"

"No, he doesn't want you," faltered her companion, desperately, "but I will take you. Only hear me first. He is dead, Janet. Dead when we found him. Dead."

He expected that she would faint or scream when the full significance of his tidings was thus made known. But she did neither. Her lips twitched and broke into a smile, that sent a shiver of horror through him. If she had heard what he said, his words had carried no meaning. He dropped her hands, and she picked up her hat from the table and rushed for her shawl. "He is waiting," she whispered, "there is nothing else to tell—come."

At this juncture Edna made her presence known. She looked awe-stricken, but rushed to Janet's side and attempted to draw her over to the sofa. "Oh, Neal, what shall we do! Oh, she don't believe you! I was awake—I heard. Oh, Neal, make her believe! Tell her! See, see, she don't understand! Oh, Neta, darling, listen. Don't look like that!" But it was impos-

sible to bring the truth home to her. Their attempts only called forth the same request to be taken to Robert. Arguments were useless. That vacant stare ; those dull eyes ; that awful smile could not be broken by mere words. Edna's trembling fingers tied the strings of her hat and fastened her shawl, but it took both Neal and Edna to lead her out to the veranda where the carriage was waiting. She took her seat as they bade her, but she asked no questions, and Edna was too horrified to evince any curiosity. The day was breaking as they drove quickly along the familiar road. Bright bars of light were visible in the East.

"Your aunt, Mrs. Durward, is here," explained Neal, as they turned in at the gate. "I hope she will keep the crowd back."

"Milly," faltered Edna, faintly, "did you find her?"

"No, Aunt Penelope is there. Everything is being done."

He was himself, now, and spoke with his customary decision. Several scared, curious faces peered into the coach as it stopped before the steps, but a quick command from Neal made them retreat.

Mrs. Durward hurried through the open door. She was pale, but her manner was determined. She had nerves and tongue well under control. "The house is full of gaping fools," she announced. "No one seems to have a mind to clear them off. They are waiting for the coroner."

"Stay out of sight, then, till I come for you," said Neal, giving Janet his arm and gently leading her in, entreating her meanwhile to permit Mrs. Durward and Edna to take her away from the eager onlookers in the hall up to her own room. She followed them obediently until Mrs. Durward closed the door ; then she



glanced from her aunt to Edna, appealingly. "You are keeping me from him. Oh, Aunt Lydia, he wants me. You are so slow. Let me go—let me find him."

"Didn't Neal tell you the truth," began Mrs. Durward. "It is cruel to deceive you. Edna, you are covered with mud; for pity's sake go to your room. If you see your father and Uncle Anthony, tell them I am with Janet. Now, don't look at me like that," she added, addressing her elder niece. "A terrible trouble has come to you, but don't make matters worse by losing your senses. Sit down. Would you like a cup of tea or coffee? You have got a chill, I do believe, but you must know the worst. It has been an awful night. A whole pack of men posted over for me and your Uncle Anthony at three o'clock. It was a good two hours before they got permission to move him and they wouldn't have dared then only for the Captain. Janet, do sit down. You will need your strength, every mite of it. I declare, Edna would be more reasonable."

She was obliged to scold. It was a safety-valve. She was also obliged to stand rigidly with her back to the door. She had observed many a person in trouble before, but in the whole course of her life she had never seen any one look as Janet looked now. Her dark eyes roved about the room but settled on nothing. She appeared to look through the woman at the door. It was apparent that she had not in the least comprehended what had been said to her, for she kept up the same pitiful cry to be allowed to go to Robert, and Mrs. Durward began to ardently long for the sound of Neal's step. In her opinion, Janet was fast growing insane, and needed the shock of an actual sight of that still form below, to be spared such an affliction. Her entreaties grew sharper and sharper as her anxiety increased. She

gave more minute particulars of the shooting. She explained that it had been done with a pistol belonging to Laurie, for the weapon had been found a few rods from the body. She told how people all declared that the bullet had been meant for Laurie. She was remorseless, but her object was not attained. Janet sat crouching on the lounge, and gave no heed. At last Neal appeared and the worst half hour that Mrs. Durward had ever endured was over.

"Take her down, Neal," she cried; "for pity's sake let her see him. You would think that she was made of stone. Have they gone?"

"Yes." He held out his hand to Janet and she came forward eagerly. "You understand," he said, solemnly, "that Robert is——"

"I know—I know. Oh, Neal, you are all so cruel to me. He wants me and I have been waiting—waiting so long. I won't excite him. Let me go—let me go!"

It needed a restraining arm to prevent her from dashing down the stairs. A group of men rapidly dispersed as she approached the sitting-room, but she did not see them. The shades were partly drawn; only a gleam of the early morning sun entered, but a single ray fell across the couch and its burden. Neal managed to lead her in, but she broke from his detaining grasp and in an instant was down on her knees by the dead man's side. His head rested naturally, peacefully, on the pillow. A lock of wavy hair lay on his forehead. She touched it tenderly with her fingers, murmuring, "They kept me, darling. They wouldn't let me come, and you are hurt. Oh, Robert, speak to me; it is I, Neta. Oh, darling, your hands are so cold—so cold. Let me warm them. You used to love to

have me warm them, but I can't—I can't now, and you won't speak to me."

She turned around and looked at Neal, standing close behind her. No one present ever forgot that glance, or the cry that followed it. "Dead—dead—not that! Cold, Neal, but not dead!"

Strong arms caught her as she reeled backward. For the moment, relief had come with unconsciousness.

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## CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE town was in a ferment of excitement. Knots of men gathered on the corners and discussed the tragedy with eloquent tongues. Much sympathy was expressed for Robert Cameron's widow, and not a little pity was given to poor old John Felton, who was wondering what was to be done with his demented son. The boy had been found in the woods, wandering near his victim. The shock of achieving a purpose that had been burning in his mind for years had clouded his last spark of reason. He did not know of the mistake that he had made. He fell into a dull stupor of satisfaction, and offered no resistance whatever when his father was finally permitted to lead him away.

A few there were who shook their heads and declared that they were not surprised. They had always expected the boy to end his career among them by some such deed as this. Of course these people were listened to with grave respect. No one asked why they had not divulged their belief in season to prevent the awful catastrophe.

There was not a hackman within five miles who did

not envy big Teddy Mulligan his luck in being the man to drive Laurie Cameron home from the station upon the arrival of the first train from New York. Teddy's carriage had no glass partition. He carried few fares who were unwilling to exchange a word or two with him, but he eyed his passenger on this particular morning with doubtful sensations.

There was no gleam of curiosity on the young man's set features. He sank down into a corner of the seat and gave Teddy the signal to proceed.

"There was grief for you, sir," Teddy remarked afterwards to some cronies. "Still as the grave he was till he turned Digby's corner, then he leaned forward a bit like, and says he—'Teddy, you know all about this awful business.' 'Troth! I do now, Mr. Laurie,' says I. Says he, 'He was dead when they found him?' Says I, 'As dead as a herring.' That made him get a mite pale, and he leaned agin' the back of the seat, stunned like. 'Teddy,' he says again, after a spell o' thinking, 'that bullet was meant for me, not for my brother—that crazy fiend had nothin' agin' him.' 'No,' says I, 'that's what they do be sayin'. 'It was an awful mistake for him.' 'Awful!' I says, and then I told him everything I knew." By which it must be understood that Laurie had the facts well in mind when he arrived at home. Miss Penelope stood in the doorway as he got out of the carriage. He betrayed no surprise at her presence there, and uttered no word as she motioned for him to follow her into the library.

He was entirely unprepared, however, for the intelligence of Milly's disappearance. The telegram that had summoned him had only mentioned the tragedy in the woods.

She had assured herself over and over again during

the terrible hours that she had been awaiting his coming, that she did not pity him, but her heart was not as hardened as she thought, and the words that first bubbled to her lips were tender words, almost as tender as she would have used had Neal stood thus before her, crushed and speechless.

"Your father is at the house," she faltered, finally; "he and Neal are attending to everything. Miss Randle is hysterical, so there is no one to stay here but me."

"Milly?" he interjected, feebly.

"Milly—I'm coming to that," she continued, her voice gaining strength as her smouldering resentment against him reawakened with the mention of his wife's name. "I have sent three men out on different roads. Your father gave them five dollars apiece not to spread the story over the town, but not one has returned yet." He sank into a chair and looked up at her with increasing perplexity. "You don't know what I mean," she went on, keeping her gaze steadily fixed on his face—"but it's soon told. Milly's gone. She got up in the middle of the night in the storm—if she's not dead already—she will die."

"What!" he ejaculated, springing to his feet. "For God's sake—what more—where has she gone? What are you trying to tell me?"

"The truth," she returned, with wonderful calmness, now that the worst was told. "I can't tell you where she's gone because I don't know. I could tell you why she's gone—but—but it's unnecessary—you know that."

He went closer. His voice was husky as he returned hastily,

"You don't believe—you don't think for a single instant, that I dreamed—she'd take a step like this? I'll

go at once—she can't have gone far—she——” but his companion checked him as he seized his hat.

“She's been travelling for ten hours on foot, for I have ascertained that no woman left by the last train. Now, Laurie, for heaven's sake, be a man. There's no sense in your running off at random. Your father, for once in his life, has shown a spark of common sense. He has telegraphed to every town around us. And three good men are tramping along the loneliest and less frequented roads. We will find her—we must find her, but it is driving me frantic to think of the time it's taking. Now, do go and get something to eat. You're as white as a sheet. Your father will be back by eleven, but I'll wait till he comes, though there's nothing I can do over there. Janet's aunt is a host.”

“You—you say that this action of Milly's isn't known,” he faltered.

“Not outside of the home, I hope.”

“It will be,” he said with a feeling of deep annoyance, as he thought of the interpretation that people were sure to put upon the affair. Only last night he had been willing to endure any amount of publicity. He had actually planned to lay the case before his wife, and advise—nay urge her to apply for a divorce; but since then, Death had come to them. That terrible deed in the woods had dispelled his calculations.

The shock was particularly sharp, because he realized that it had been a mere caprice of fate that he himself was not at this moment lying in Rob's place.

Under other conditions, Milly's unforeseen rashness would have angered him immoderately, but he was too sore now to harbor resentment, indeed, he was only dully sensible of what had happened. Others were acting for him. Miss Penelope had explained that.

He craved to be alone, and dreaded the sound of a human voice, so he sought the studio with a view to waiting for his father there. Of late it had been a habit of his to lock this apartment when he left home, though he provided Milly with a duplicate key. As he let himself in, the idea occurred to him that perhaps she was hiding here. He looked around carefully and then threw up the window. How stuffy and warm it was, he pondered, eyeing the wide gravelled walk outside, flecked here and there with patches of sunshine that struggled through the density of the foliage overhead. He was not thinking unless the most disconnected flashes of intelligent speculation can be called thought. He had a dim realization that Miss Penelope might seek him any minute with a telegram—the telegram might be followed by Milly in person. The last six hours had exhausted his capacity for surprise.

Inaction became almost stupefying at last. He turned and began to pace the room restlessly. Three, four times he strode by a small table near the fireplace before his glance fell on an envelope lying there, face up and bearing his own name. To reach for it and tear it open was the work of an instant. A page or two of close, delicate writing in Milly's familiar hand made him drop into a chair and read hastily as follows—

“DEAR LAURIE :—

“First I want to convince you that my head is perfectly clear and that I understand what it means to do what I am going to do. I am afraid you will be angry. I have heard you say so often that two-thirds of the world's scandals are caused by woman's folly. You always said you would hate a woman who compromised you. I have thought of all this. I have thought of

how people will talk, but I cannot help it. I am very selfish. I ought to stay and do my duty. I ought to stay and let you tell me about what I heard you say to-night, but I cannot. I could never forget, and there is really nothing to say. We could never be happy together again. You see I understand, now, how you feel. I don't think I am surprised. I have loved you very much and I have been happy. You made me very happy, you must remember that. Now, about the money. I am going to take all there is in my purse, and some time I will find a way to communicate with you and get a little each month. I can live on very little. I suppose I ought to wait till morning and go and see Aunt Penelope, but what could I tell her. You tell her that I will write by and by, and for her not to worry about me. Perhaps Neal will come to see me. Perhaps, dear, it won't be long. I don't want to die. I can't bring myself to want to die yet, but may be I will. Don't think I feel angry. I can never help loving you—only of course, it must not be, when you love some one else. I am sure you tried not to. I hope you can read this, my lamp is so dim. I am afraid to turn it up for fear Edna will come in. I am going to put this in the studio where you will find it. Oh, Laurie! I hope you understand me.

“MILLY.”

The sheet fell limply from his hand, and he stared hard at the paper as it fluttered to the rug at his feet. He had never realized before what a singular woman he had married. Even in that last hour, when she was taking leave of her home and penning this most extraordinary letter of farewell to himself, the simple dignity, the quiet suppression, the old regard for his feelings



had not left her. Hers was truly a peculiar nature, tuned to a higher harmony than his less sensitive ear could comprehend. He had always meant to treat her well, but he had never appreciated her rare delicacy, her unselfishness and the silent but sure effacement of her own inclinations in his. Some faint perception of all this dawned upon him now as he sat there staring at the sheet. He had not the slightest doubt but that she would be found in a few hours. He did not know what he should say to her. He did not know how they would live. He made no resolve, but he was conscious of feeling sorry for her. It was strange that he should exalt her now that she had taken a step of which he most heartily disapproved. Any day during the past three months, he would have willingly thrown aside his own obligations, but he recoiled from the idea of such a lapse on her part.

Fully an hour went by before the door opened to admit the Captain. The young man rose hastily. A few words were interchanged, while he watched his father's face, noting its gravity and its red eyelids.

"This is a horrible business, a horrible business," cried the old man, refusing to be seated. "God bless me! who would have thought of that sneaking youngster playing us a trick like this. You did very wrong—very wrong indeed not to have informed me of his animosity for yourself. I would have been warned. An imbecile's hatred is often a hot and dangerous sentiment."

"I know," interrupted his son, "but you forget—you did know something of the boy's feelings—I've asked you repeatedly to go to his father—however, I thought the rest of the family were safe enough—it's clear who the ball was meant for."

"Yes, yes, so I hear—and it's your fault, Laurence. Your contemptible vanity—you played fast and loose with that girl—you—— By Jove, sir! now I come to think of it, where is your wife?"

"I don't know."

"I suppose not, but you at least know what sent her off in a chase like this. What did you do to her? I never saw such a lot of buttoned mouths—that most estimable female in the other room never had paralysis of the tongue before. I trust you are not similarly afflicted. There was nothing flighty about her. She wouldn't have done such a thing for want of a new bonnet. You've ill-treated her, sir. You've got in some disgraceful scrape or other and she's found you out, and others have found you out. By Heaven! If I'm right—there is no place for you here. I don't adore the sex, but I never drove a wife of mine to extremes like this—never—God bless my soul! One boy dead and the other disgraced—a pretty showing—a pretty showing, indeed—your mother will turn in her grave!" He blew his nose vigorously and stopped for breath, shaking the floor in his excited tramp, gesticulating with emphatic sweepings of the arm, firing off questions to which his auditor was given no chance to reply, and concluding by falling into a chair and leaning his head on the table. The sight of his son's dead face had opened a soft spot in his heart to the ownership of which he had given little heed in the past, but he was a man who had never been willing to sit down and consort unreservedly with grief. He was given to veiling one emotion by granting unrestrained license to another, therefore he seized upon Milly's disappearance and used it for all it was worth in the

way of angry vituperation and forcible denunciation of Laurie's unknown sin against her.

He was not in a condition to listen to any defence that his son strove to make. He was aflame with indignation, and would not pause long enough to explain what means he had employed for the necessary search, so Laurie unceremoniously left him and rushed back to the library to see if Miss Penelope was still there, but it was Miss Randle's face that confronted him and rather hastened his exit again.

Three or four messages were received at noon, but each and all were unsatisfactory. Two men returned and also reported failure. Laurie's impatience reached fever heat at three o'clock and he started off himself. It was a ride that he never forgot. Mile after mile of the lonely country roads yielded no sign. Farmer after farmer greeted his eager questions with the same blank shake of the head. It seemed as though the earth had opened and swallowed her. Night drew near before he turned back, but he did not go home until he had interviewed and despatched an able Norwood detective on the quest.

No news awaited him at the house. The Captain was absent. Miss Randle bore him company while he gulped down a cup of coffee. He did not hear a word she said, much less reply to her mournful remarks. He was thinking that the moment had come when he could no longer shun a visit to the desolate family across the village. They would expect him. He must go and look at Rob. He must give voice to some trite meaningless expressions of condolence. It was inhuman to stay away any longer, but in his present overwrought condition he felt that in their hearts they were bemoaning Ezra's fatal mistake. He felt somehow that he

ought to be in Rob's place and the conclusion induced a most extravagant love of life.

Walking over, he shudderingly compared his own vitality and strength with the inanimate rigid form that he was soon to see. He would have gone to any length to have his brother back among them again, but at the same time he could not help thinking that Rob's death meant life for him. He was becoming morbidly fearful that others would read his relief. He was deeply sensible of his cowardice, but he was powerless to overcome it.

Neal admitted him and called him into the billiard-room where fifteen minutes at least were consumed in telling Miss Penelope how little had been accomplished in the search for Milly.

Miss Penelope became excited and impatient. She was sure that the child would die. She wondered that they had not thought of scouring the woods. She might have wandered into the woods and died there. Laurie did not allude to the letter that had been left for him. His voice was somewhat hard as he suggested that a single night's exposure would not be fatal to a person in health. He knew that Neal was looking at him. He knew that they both deemed him a scoundrel, and were politely veiling their true opinion, but he did not seem to care.

He inquired for Janet and thereby turned the current of Miss Penelope's solicitude into another channel.

They told him that Janet was still the same. She had not shed a tear and she had to be constantly watched. Edna and Mrs. Durward were with her now. She would sit for hours and stare at nothing and then if they did not prevent her, she would creep downstairs

to Robert's side and crouch there on the floor beside the coffin. It was very dreadful, Miss Penelope said, to see grief like that, so stony, so immovable, so unnatural. Laurie hastily agreed, and remarked that he would not disturb her. He would like to go into the other room, however. Neal nodded, and started to direct him.

As they left the room, Miss Penelope nervously changed her seat. She did not know what made her so uneasy. Certainly not that poor boy; but she started violently when a small white face suddenly peered in at her from between the curtains of a rear doorway.

"Aunt Penelope," questioned the girl under her breath—"has—has he heard anything? They're in the other room, aren't they?"

"Yes—but he has heard nothing."

"Oh, how dreadfully slow they are—Oh, I wish I could go!"

"Nonsense," cried the elder woman, sharply, "you are needed here. How is Janet now?"

"Just the same. I don't think she believes he is dead. I think it is going to kill her, and then I will die too—I wish I could."

"People don't die by wishing—don't be silly, child."

"I'm not, I'm in earnest. It would be ever so much easier to die than to live, I suppose that's why I'll have to live."

"I know you have been a foolish, vain child, but it is not for me to judge you. No, I am sorry for you, and I never meant to be. I'm sorry for him and I didn't mean to be either—but he's Helen's son, you know. I can't forget that entirely. When my little dove comes

back, I'll take her. Yes, yes. Hurry, they're coming.<sup>2</sup> And the form in the doorway disappeared quickly.

Miss Penelope looked up, but Neal was alone, and another season of weary suspense ensued.

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## CHAPTER XXIX.

MIDDLETOWN'S population was, for the greater part, German, a certain section of the city being almost entirely given up to them.

Summer evenings saw the streets filled with groups of jovial Teutons on the stoops fronting their dwellings. Wherever ease and air was to be found, they congregated with their families.

Mr. Jacob Rhinelander was well known here, not so much for any merit or demerit of his own, but because he happened to be Mrs. Jacob Rhinelander's husband.

Mrs. Jacob was a remarkable woman. Ten years under the same roof had taught Jacob that his wife's opinion was valuable. It became his habit to seek it frequently. It spared him the effort of thinking, and laid the foundation for his subsequent attainment of two hundred and seventy-five pounds avoirdupois.

As he sat alone on his shallow porch, puffing great clouds of smoke from his long pipe and placidly regarding his portly knees, he discovered that a young woman had paused directly in front of him and was evidently about to speak.

He removed his pipe from his mouth and looked out from under his shaggy eyebrows.

To him she seemed scarcely larger than a child, but

her attitude indicated great weariness, and her brown eyes met his so beseechingly, that he was considerably flustered.

"I am a stranger," she said, in a weak, little voice. "I didn't want to go to a hotel. They told me on the corner that you might have a room. I—I have money. Could you let me stay? I——"

"Gretta!" he bawled, puffing on his pipe and vouchsafing no other reply. "Gretta! Ho! Gretta! I say."

His tone was far-reaching and Mrs. Jacob speedily appeared. She was a large, round woman with a kindly face, and a reassuring, if somewhat brusque manner.

Jacob pointed to the waiting figure below him on the sidewalk and briefly repeated her request. Mrs. Jacob hesitated for a moment, then her pity was awakened and she said—

"Come inside. You look ready to drop."

Jacob moved back his chair with a grunt of satisfaction and the two entered the house.

As she led the way to the parlor and saw the stranger seated, Mrs. Jacob had grasped an idea and immediately set it forth in words.

"There isn't an empty corner in this house," she began. "Jacob never knows nothin' about my rooms, but I'll tell you what I'll do. I have one lodger, a young woman who might share with you for a night. She's a good soul. She works in Nelson & Son's print works. I'll see her. Have you come far?"

"Yes."

"Afoot?"

"I have walked a long way."

"And are all beat out. I won't ask no questions. Your face's character enough for one night. Now I'll

see if that girl's in and then get you a sup. Shall it be beer or tea?"

"Neither, thanks. I'm not thirsty, only tired."

"Tut, tut, I've no respect for empty stomachs. Sit here a bit and rest you."

To climb two flights of stairs was an undertaking for Mrs. Jacob, but she accomplished the feat with great agility; and receiving an encouraging response from her lodger started for the kitchen, stopping on her way, to tell the stranger that the young woman would be down in a moment and then bustling out to whisper in Jacob's ear that she had a mystery in the parlor.

"She's run away from home, or something, mark my words," she affirmed, positively, "and nothin' but a child, poor little mite! Don't you say nothing to the Mergers, Jacob," and Jacob nodded knowingly.

Meanwhile night was advancing, and in Mrs. Jacob's parlor it was almost too dark to note the vivid patches of red and green in the wall-paper or trace the bright flowers in the carpet; but there was sufficient light left to see the miserable little figure leaning back in Mrs. Jacob's arm-chair. Her shoes were damp and stiff. Her clothes streaked with mud and disfigured with wrinkles; her straw hat wilted from severe wetting.

A small parcel lay on her lap, but the wretchedness of her attire was lost to view when one looked at her face. Her eyes bore no trace of weeping, but they wore a strained, frightened expression as a child's will in the dark. Her features were pinched and blue as though she were cold.

She turned her head as the door opened, and, grasping her bundle, rose timidly.

Mrs. Jacob's lodger approached without speaking. A ray of light from a street lamp fell upon her. She



was eyeing her companion very sharply, when the latter's white, trembling lips uttered a cry that astonished her beyond measure.

"Oh, Kathie, Kathie, is it you? I didn't know it, I didn't know it was you! I'm so glad, so glad! You know me! Look! I've startled you, but——"

"Know you! yes; but, Mrs. Cameron, whatever has brought you here alone, like—like this?"

"Alone! Yes, I am alone, that is it. Oh, Kathie, let me come closer. I'm dying, because I am alone. I did not think it could be so dreadful. You will let me stay to-night, won't you?" she pleaded, her parcel falling to the floor as her numb fingers caught Kathie's hand. "I'm so tired. That's why I feel it so much."

"You came from home, of course," faltered her listener, too amazed even yet to clearly understand what it all meant.

"Yes, I came from him. I will tell you by and by. I will tell you why I came," she continued, nervously. "Oh, I'm so glad I got to this house. It was all by chance. To-morrow you will tell me what to do. You are so brave and strong, I always thought that of you, Kathie, always, and somehow it comforts me now, but—I may stay?"

"Yes, yes, come upstairs. I will see Mrs. Rhineland later and tell her we—we are acquainted. You shall stay as long as you will. I am glad to have you. Let me take the bundle."

Kathie thought at one time her visitor would never gain the top floor, so slowly and painfully did the weary limbs perform the journey, but the room was reached at last—Kathie's own bright cozy room—and the much craved rest was near at hand.

The wet clothes, the muddy shoes were removed by

very gentle fingers ; the aching feet bathed and rubbed most soothingly ; the tangled hair brushed—and then, enveloped in a loose wrapper, Kathie's visitor began to cry, because she was so comfortable. Kathie's own eyes filled too, from sympathy, as she watched the frail form stretched on her little cot bed, and she was obliged to hurry downstairs and interview Mrs. Jacob in order to regain her composure.

Mrs. Jacob was visibly amazed, upon being told that the stranger had turned out to be a friend, but Kathie did not linger to explain matters. In time she would be able to concoct some plausible story to account for Mrs. Cameron's plight. She was only anxious now to return with the steaming tea and toast that Mrs. Jacob had thoughtfully prepared.

It required an effort, however, to prevail upon Milly to touch her offering, but Kathie hailed the disappearance of even a crumb of toast and a few swallows of tea with satisfaction.

A small student lamp threw a pleasant light about the room and displayed the many clever contrivances that Kathie had fashioned to render the spot cheerful and attractive.

Milly listened with dreamy attention while the girl talked of her life here, her peace of mind and her ambition to help the others at home. Her remarks were a trifle disconnected, but her one object was to hide any appearance of curiosity and remove from Milly's mind the idea that she was waiting for an explanation.

At last she knew that the words she must hear were hovering on Milly's lips.

With a final effort to put off the inevitable story, she plunged into a description of some plans that she

had been forming for her little sister's welfare, when her companion interrupted her eagerly—

"Oh, Kathie, you are so capable. You know how to do all these things, but I don't. My hands would stop working when I got to thinking, and I suppose I will think for—for a long time yet. You are very good. You don't ask me how I happen to be here, but I will tell you. There is very little to tell. I found out that I could not be happy with my—husband—I mean he—he could not be happy. My head gets very queer when I try to remember just how it was, but it wouldn't interest a stranger. I used to think a woman was very wicked to leave her home as—as I have done, but—I did not know then.

"It is not right to be positive about things till—we feel them. I am not at all positive now.

"No one knows where I am. They would not have understood. You see it was best for me to go—I suppose they are hunting for me, but I went over the fields, almost all the way to Norwood and when it got light, a man—a farmer—I think, let me get in the back of his wagon. He drove such a queer little black horse with long ears, I will always remember that horse. I rode a long way. I wanted to get to a city. I think God brought me to you. You see he knew I needed some one to help me. When I get rested I will be stronger. I won't trouble you, and you won't tell, Kathie, will you? I will write to them after—after a while.

"I understand, now, why people sometimes want to die. Everything in life seems to stop, they cannot go back, they cannot go on, they just want to sink out of sight, but it is wicked to feel that way, I suppose. I am not going to, Kathie, when I get rested, not after

to-night. I can't be brave to-night because—I'm so tired—so tired.

“Poor dear Aunt Penelope—she will feel badly—but perhaps she will understand. I think everybody will understand—people probably knew all about—about us before,—before I understood—but they forget such things after a while. I'm sure they will forget. It is wicked, perhaps, to forget, but God will let me forget a little—just a little, of the past; two or three things that hurt so to remember, but—not everything—not my baby—I would not like to go where I could not think of him——”

Her voice grew weaker and her gaze wandered. Kathie had stationed her rocker at the side of the cot, with her back to the lamp. She bit her lip and tried to swallow the lump that seemed to be in her throat.

Milly's story was only a fragment, but oh, how much Kathie's imagination could supply. Glancing at the white face before her, so heavily marked with suffering, she thought of her own tears that time had dried. The hours of bitterness, anger and longing; the moments of uprising hope and jubilant anticipation that had been mercifully buried so deep, that even memory was powerless to drag them forth, with any semblance of their old-time fervor. She gloried in her self-mastery and wanted to dance on the grave of her early love and be joyous over her liberation.

As Milly at last closed her eyes and stretched out her hand, she touched the slender fingers reverently. A sense of awe fell upon her. In an undefined way she felt that Milly had been sent to her, thus to add another shade of intensity to her contempt for the man who had cast such a shadow over her youth.

She had decided early in the summer, during her brief visit home, that it was only a question of months, aye weeks, before the truth must dawn upon Laurie Cameron's wife. She had wondered greatly at his recklessness. She remembered how careful he had been to avoid exciting comment in the days of their meetings. She felt that his present infatuation must be stronger than any he had hitherto indulged in to make him willing to brave the scandal which threatened them.

The heartless, selfish cruelty of his attitude caused her no surprise, but she marveled at the woman who was his partner in this disgraceful breaking up of his home. There could be no true love, no tenderness, no mercy in that heart.

She gave a sigh of relief when she perceived that her charge slept at last, and at once set about making her own bed on the couch across the room. It was still early, and thinking her companion might waken and want something before the house was closed she threw herself down without undressing.

She was too much excited to be sleepy. Her thoughts dwelt persistently on the events of the evening. She knew perfectly well that Milly's relatives would find her. Her husband would doubtless leave town for a season, and she did not believe he would go alone.

It might culminate in a divorce. No one could tell.

She rose, finally, and put a shade over the light. Milly's heavy breathing attracted her attention, and she crept to the side of the cot in quick alarm. The face that had been so deathlike on the pillow an hour before looked flushed and feverish now. She lifted

the hand on the coverlet, but it was cold and clammy to the touch. She bent closer and looked anxiously at the half-closed eyelids and the dry lips that seemed to move now and then with a faint moan.

She wondered what she ought to do. If serious illness was impending, Mrs. Jacob would know. It certainly would not do to delay seeking advice until morning.

She gave a swift glance around the room. How terrible it would be if anything were to happen to Milly here, away from all her people. What if Death, the great leveler, were to step in and settle their domestic complication.

The girl caught her breath and brought her teeth together sharply.

A sudden fierce longing took possession of her. All the native impetuosity of her nature rose to the surface and gave force to her determination.

If Milly's recent mental shock and exposure were to terminate in prostration of mind and body, an eager, earnest, self-relying nurse was already armed for the struggle.

Stealing noiselessly across the room, Kathie opened the door softly and paused at the head of the stairs, for the person whom she sought was laboriously ascending.

"There's some one to see you below," announced Mrs. Jacob, between her gasps for breath. "A man and a boy, leastwise he's small. Wherever will we put 'em?"

"To see me?" echoed Kathie, "are you sure?"

"Yes, he's come from the country by his looks."

"Oh, it must be father. He's come about—about my friend. I'll go right down. He won't want to stay

all night," and without giving Mrs. Jacob time to reply, she darted off, and for the second time that night entered her landlady's parlor.

The lamp on the mantel revealed her father's face. She greeted him in fear and trembling.

Ezra crept toward her and she bent and kissed him, conscious of a certain dull feeling of surprise at his presence.

He seized a fold of her dress and began to stroke it as her father spoke.

"Kate, my lass, we're in sore trouble."

"Teenie—mother?" she gasped.

"No, no, the lad here. He's clean daft now. He did a fearful deed last night. He shot Mr. Robert Cameron dead—Kate—dead."

"What!" she cried, suddenly, growing rigid with horror. "Father! Dear, dear father, what are you saying?"

"'Tis so," he went on, stolidly. "'Tis so, lass. I canna well believe it mysel', but 'tis true. He got a pistol of Mr. Laurie's from the studio and met him in the woods last night——"

"Mr. Laurie, father?"

"No, no, his brother. I've brought Ezra here, Kate. It seemed best. His mind's clear gone. They could do nought wi' him so, the Captain tells me, but we'll have to have a care that no more harm is done. Would to God I'd a thought of such a possibility months ago."

"Oh! but this was a mistake," she said, excitedly. "He never meant to hurt Mr. Robert. It—it was the other. Oh! it's my fault. I knew he hated him. I've always known it. Oh, father, pity me, pity me—Oh, you don't understand, you don't know——"

She flung her arms around his neck and gave vent to a paroxysm of sobs.

He stroked her hair and murmured fond, loving words in an attempt to soothe her.

He thought the shock had turned her brain. His beautiful lass, his brave, bonnie Kate, at fault—he scouted the idea.

Ezra, too, called upon her to stop, and he beat his hands together, then protested that she could be happy now. He grovelled on the floor at her feet, until his excitement restored her self-possession to a degree, and she made them both sit down while she formulated some plan of action.

“My landlady has a brother who is a doctor ; he lives across the street. He’s a German. I will tell her, and perhaps she will get him to take Ezra—for a few days—till—till we can find a place. To-night you’ll both sleep here. I’ll get her to have a bed fixed. Oh, father, did you hear anything about Mrs. Cameron ?”

“Mrs. Robert ?”

“No, Mrs. Laurie. Don’t people know that she’s left town—left her home ?”

“Your mother was talking this morning.”

“Then it is not generally known.”

“No, leastways no one spoke to me.”

“I’m glad—glad they don’t know,” she returned, quickly, “but—father, she’s here—upstairs. She ran away from—from home. It’s a dreadful story. I’m afraid she’s going to be sick. You wait here, I must see Mrs. Jacob. I’ll be quick.”

In spite of her anxiety, however, it required time to force so many facts upon Mrs. Jacob’s understanding. The request that two beds be made in the parlor stupe-



fied her at first, but she rose to the occasion after some slight hesitation.

Kathie next asked her to go and look at Milly. The good woman did so, and gave it as her opinion that it was to be a fever. She would get John, her brother, to come over early in the morning. She did not believe the case urgent enough to get him out of bed at this hour.

She was very sure he would be able to take Ezra with him till they could look around. There was a fine lunatic asylum two miles out of the town towards Newburyville, if Kathie was sure the boy was a lunatic.

Half an hour later the house was quiet once more. Mrs. Jacob, touched by Kathie's white, troubled face, took herself off and left the girl alone with her relatives.

It was a strange trio. Kneeling on the floor beside the doubled-up comfortables that Mrs. Jacob had arranged for Ezra, Kathie for the first time in her life realized something of the intensity of the boy's love for her. Though awed and shocked by what he had done, her heart was full of pity that found expression in a sudden rush of tenderness. She held his hands and bathed his heated temples and sang in a low, soft voice, snatches of the songs he used to love, swayed by an overwhelming yearning to repay him for his long years of never-wearying, animal-like devotion that had culminated so terribly.

There was a peaceful smile on his thin, worn face, as he sank off to sleep. Her fingers still lay in his grasp. She feared to move for some moments lest she might disturb him. Then, as his breathing became more regular, she slipped away and stole noiselessly

across the room to the side of the sofa on which John Felton was stretching his weary limbs. Crouching on the floor she rubbed her face caressingly against his rough cheek. She bent closer and flung her arms across his broad chest, while they talked under their breath. Her story was brokenly, tearfully told, but her heart was too full to keep silent and she knew that he would love her just the same whatever she might have done in the past.

She kept nothing back, but when she had finished, he grew very heated and indignant at the idea of her holding herself responsible for her brother's mad act. He called her by every endearing name that he could remember. "His brave Kate. His bonny, true lass." They were in sore trouble it was true, but it was none of her making.

The thought of her charge sleeping above, made the girl rise and hasten upstairs.

She could detect no change in the sleeper, but she determined to watch till daybreak.

With the coming of the first streak of dawn her anxiety for Milly made further waiting an impossibility. By five o'clock she aroused Mrs. Jacob, and in less than twenty minutes the old German doctor stood by Milly's bedside.

Kathie did not hear what he told Mrs. Jacob in the hall, but his few words to her were very grave, and sent the girl flying downstairs to her father.

Seven o'clock saw John Felton hurrying for the first train that would connect with the east-bound Cau-sauqua local.

Ezra was being cared for. He felt easy about the boy, but he was awe-stricken by the message that he was carrying to Mrs. Laurie Cameron's people.

Acute pneumonia, together with some serious brain trouble, were a grim and terrible pair to fight and the chances were that death would win.

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## CHAPTER XXX.

IN seasons of great grief when it is impossible to look ahead, and see anything bright awaiting us in the future, the aspect of familiar surroundings frequently strikes sharply on our wounded feelings, by reason of the fact that they are unchanged. The sun shines as gloriously as ever, though in spirit we may be groping through the darkest night of trouble.

Dully, but none the less surely, Edna Morvick was sensible of this as she walked over to Miss Penelope's on the morning of that lady's return from her sad sojourn in Middletown. Edna wanted to know all the particulars of Milly's brief and fatal illness. She had nerved herself thus to seek the details. She intended to tell Miss Penelope that she was Milly's murderer.

The idea was very deeply rooted now, after dwelling upon it for the seven dreadful days that had elapsed since she had heard of Milly's presence in Kate Felton's lodgings in Middletown. It had deadened her realization of Janet's loss. It had rendered her unconscious of the gravity of Janet's stupor which still continued.

It had even sent her to Robert's funeral with dry eyes. She felt that she would never cry or sleep again. She could not explain anything now. She could not devote the remainder of her days to making her friend forget, and take heart once more as she had planned to do. She had deemed herself capable of any sacrifice,

and her imagination had conjured up vivid pictures of their future.

But now, all these schemes, born of a passionate, frenzied yearning to force the old brightness back into Milly's life, were never to know fulfilment.

A great eternal silence had stepped between them.

She quickened her steps as she approached the house, and a feeling of dizziness almost overpowered her. Milly's hammock still swung on the veranda. There was the little red rocker she had always used, close to the sitting-room window. It was all a nightmare, this story that she had heard of their having brought her home to Randlemeade that morning, dead. It seemed as though she must be here, must come to the door, with that sweet smile on her face just as she had come so many times in the past, before her marriage.

Edna felt instinctively that Miss Penelope would not want to see her, but she had no thought of abandoning her purpose. Once inside, the silence gave her a chill. Neal's door was ajar and his room empty. Miss Penelope was upstairs in Milly's old room, she was told, and thither she started without hesitation.

"Let me come in," she whispered, as the door was reluctantly opened. "Oh, Aunt Penelope, just for a few minutes." Her voice, so pitifully pleading, together with the sight of her face, overcame Miss Penelope's disinclination to talk. Bidding the girl enter, they sat down together on the couch. Miss Penelope's eyes were very red and for a moment she could not speak, but the sight of her tears did not visibly move her companion. She appeared to be waiting for some unexpected accusation, and when it did not come she began her confession voluntarily.

"I don't know how much you know," she cried,

brokenly; "I don't know how much you've guessed, but I did it, Aunt Penelope—but for me she would not be lying over there as she is now. I've told you some of this before, but not all—I didn't tell you that I did care for him. I didn't tell you that I listened when he talked of—of our going away together. I didn't tell you that at times I was wicked enough—mad enough, to forget her—yes, even to—to wish she wasn't there. Oh, Aunt Penelope, it is dreadful to be influenced by another like that, dreadful! Just think what had to happen to wake me up. Oh, I hate him now! Oh, don't think I—I expect or—or look forward to anything. His very name is hateful. But don't you suppose she believed I did love her?—I did—I did—and oh, I tried, I often tried to stay away. I wanted her to be happy, yes, I did; and then at times I wanted to be happy myself—and—and there didn't seem to be but one way—then he made me forget everything. Things happened so queerly. I met him when I didn't mean to and he talked when I didn't mean to let him and then—and then sometimes when he would not talk, I'd wish that he would. Oh, how wicked I was! If I could only do something to pay for it! That is why I can't sleep. I can't do anything for her now, but I'll have to be punished and I can't think of anything bad enough to happen. I don't know what is to be done. If God took all my family away I would not care so very much. Janet's spirit is not here. If it ever comes back she'll despise me, because I mean to tell her just what I am."

This was Miss Penelope's opportunity, and she lost no time in embracing it. Drawing the girl's cold hands within her own, she began soothingly,

"My dear child, you are in a very morbid state and

you must get out of it. You must be strong for your sister's sake. Your grief for Milly, bitter as it is, will lessen with time.

"You are very young, but Janet's grief for Robert has cut very deeply. As I tell Neal, sorrow like that isn't easily bound up and I'm distracted about her. As for your own trouble, it's natural that you should suffer. I won't say you haven't done wrong. I won't say it wasn't wicked, because it was, but—if he is my own sister's son, as I tell Neal, I blame him the most. He never loved her as he should have done. He was always selfish. It was inevitable that she should find him out in time, only—only I'd never reckoned on its killing her, but she was too good to keep here. I always told Neal that I often wished she would show some fault. I would have felt happier, safer, but it was not to be. I'll always regret that she did not know any of us before the end. She never knew a thing after the doctor was called, so I don't suppose she suffered. Laurie certainly did redeem himself a little, this last week. As I tell Neal, I think he actually wanted her to live, and I wasn't looking for that spirit from him. Yes, he did everything in his power. I don't believe he's had his clothes off in a week and it was all I could do to get him to go to Robert's funeral. Although the three doctors had agreed that there wasn't a spark of hope, he didn't give up till he got back Friday night. There's no grief in the world like grief that's three parts remorse. It makes it easier to forgive him, and we must forgive him. She'll know it if we don't, and I couldn't have that."

"Does she—does she look happy, Aunt Penelope?"

"Yes, but her dear face is worn, although she was sick such a short time. There really wasn't anything

of her. As the doctors said, there was everything against her recovery from such an attack, low vitality and everything. The moment I heard she was sick I said to Neal, 'She will never get up.' Oh, this has been a dreadful time! Kate Felton has shown herself a true woman. I told Neal this morning that I'd take back every word that I've ever said against the girl. You would have thought Milly was her own flesh and blood; and as for Laurie, she treated him with the greatest dignity. She didn't do a single self-conscious thing. They've put that poor miserable boy in an excellent institution, and Kathie has taken it upon herself to pay for him. I hope some worthy young man will come along and help her. As I said to Neal, her old trouble with Laurie has made a woman of her."

"Yes, but Aunt Penelope, she did not hurt anyone else. If I'd never done any more than she's done, I could be brave too—but look at what my wrong-doing has accomplished. How can I think of anything else?"

"You will have to," said Miss Penelope, firmly. "Look at Janet; Neal says you don't see a bit of a change——"

"No," said the girl, sadly, "she's just the same. When it came to burying him, we all thought that would arouse her. The doctor said so, but it didn't. Oh, Aunt Penelope, she looked like a marble statue. I never saw anything so beautiful in my life and yet so terrible. She wouldn't wear a veil; Aunt Lydia could not make her, and she just looked straight ahead at nothing. You know all the time he—he was in the house she was with him, as much as she could be, and now she thinks he's coming back. She won't let Kitty lock the front door at night. She won't let any one sit at his place at the table, and then, Aunt Lydia says

twenty times during the night she will be wakened by Neta's sitting up in bed ; and when she tells her to lie down she begs just like a child to sit and listen for him. Oh, it is terrible ! ”

“ Terrible,” admitted Miss Penelope with mournful emphasis. “ Really, I don't know what we can do.”

“ Neal has some plan that he is going to try in a few days,” said Edna, after a pause. “ If that fails, we'll get a specialist from New York. Uncle Anthony is almost as bad as Janet. He follows her like a shadow. It makes Aunt Lydia so angry, she says he's enough to drive a sane person crazy. If it wasn't for Neal, I don't know what we would do. He and Aunt Lydia are both managers born, but—people obey Neal when his back's turned, and they don't Aunt Lydia. She's threatened to lock papa in his room because she says he's always under foot, but he don't know what to do. He can't see Neta, and as he hears so little from her I think he sometimes fancies she's gone too.”

“ Your Aunt Lydia's a very stern woman,” remarked Miss Penelope. “ I always said I wouldn't want her around me, if I was suffering. She means well, but her feelings are very hard to touch. I tell you trouble does change people, as I said to Neal just before you came in, no one would ever have imagined that Captain Cameron would take the loss as he has. When we got to the house this morning he broke down completely and Laurie had to take him out of the room. He was fond of her and I never believed he cared at all, but he has a queer way of showing emotion. I'm perfectly sure he was swearing as Laurie led him upstairs and a moment before the undertaker had opened the casket for him to see her. I suppose he will always swear, though, as long as he lives. As I tell Neal, the chances



are he will be blaspheming one moment and dead the next. I always expect those old men to go off with heart failure, or something very sudden."

"When is the funeral to be, Aunt Penelope?"

"To-morrow."

"Do you think I could go over before? It seems to me that she might hear, if I could get close to her and—and tell her again how I feel. It seems as though I could take a long breath then and I would try to help Neta. Won't you take me over? I will not make a scene—I will be very good. Oh, Aunt Penelope, I want to go," and Miss Penelope could not refuse her. Milly's death had stripped her heart of its bitterness. Penitence, however, always touched her. People never sought her sympathy in vain. She was never harsh to any one in trouble, but—her pity was not expressed in words only. She did what Milly would have had her do. She drew that fair head down on her shoulder—and kissed the sad little mouth with such sincerity of forgiveness that the floodgates were opened and the long delayed tears had their way.

Meanwhile Captain Cameron's worthy neighbors were deep in a discussion of this second calamity that had befallen the Cameron family.

The Captain interviewed his son, and wringing from him a few bare and ugly particulars, set about constructing an elaborate explanation to appease outside curiosity. Laurie assisted him only by maintaining an utter silence on the subject; but Miss Randle with less discretion and fewer facts in her possession, undid his plausible account of his daughter-in-law's sudden journey. At every turn, therefore, people listened to the Captain with great apparent respect, but—so interesting were the fragments of real truth they were able

to put together, the story moved through the town with the vitality that such tales always gather, and grew with each repetition.

In the mellow autumn sunshine that she had loved so well, they carried Milly across the village, and laid her in the Cameron plot, in the old burial-ground behind the church.

Two or three beautiful floral offerings were still fresh on Robert's grave. People were already forgetting his faults,—so many men are never our brothers until they die. The vein of goodness that runs through our nature is frequently only seen with memory's eye after we are gone. Robert's weakness was called good-nature now. His master-failing a disease of the body, not of the soul.

Neal drove Edna home from Milly's funeral. Recent events had rather overturned his old belief in her heartlessness. She had shown him that she could suffer keenly. He now desired to turn the course of her self-communings away from the dead and bring her to realize Janet's need.

He talked to her very earnestly during their drive, and told her of the plan he had contrived to arouse Janet to a sense of what had happened to her. Edna listened to him with breathless interest.

"Oh, Neal," she said at last, "isn't it cruel?"

"No harsh measures must be taken, but we will try it to-night. If that fails, I will telegraph to New York in the morning—we need not mention what I mean to do, to Mrs. Durward," he added.

"No—one can never tell how Aunt Lydia is going to take things, and I suppose she is really at the head of the house while Janet is in this way."

Neal nodded.

That night chance favored them. Mrs. Durward decided to walk over to the homestead and she also decided that Anthony should bear her company.

Janet, Neal and Edna were alone in the sitting-room. Janet, as was her custom lately, was idle. She sat in a big chair with her back to the light. Neal watched her anxiously. Her face and hands were deathlike in their pallor and her eyes were preternaturally large, but they were almost expressionless. For twenty minutes at a time she would sit with her head against the chair utterly listless, seemingly seeing nothing, then she would start forward in an attitude of listening. No one could watch her unmoved. Neal felt that he would rather see her dead, than know that she would never recover from this torpor.

Having previously agreed upon a signal, Edna waited until this was given, then—trembling violently—she rose and went into the music-room, whither, in obedience to her call a moment later, Janet followed. This was Neal's chance. After turning down the light so that only a dim radiance was shed about the room, and wheeling the couch forward a little, in order that it might face the door, through which she must re-enter, he threw himself upon it, where, almost holding his breath, he closed his eyes and waited. One, two minutes passed, before he heard the curtain rings as they were gently drawn along the pole at the doorway. He felt that she was coming and, if ever a man prayed, he prayed at that supreme moment. His fingers were locked together and tears were ready to fall from under his closed eye lids at the thought of how he was scheming to clear away the veil that hung between her and the certain misery of a full consciousness of her loss. Closer, step by step, she came and yet the dread silence continued,

but the expected cry, the prayed-for exclamation, when it did come, sent the blood coursing madly through his veins.

Down on her knees beside him she fell, her face grown suddenly haggard, her eyes wearing a new expression of acute anguish ; her words cutting both listeners to the heart in spite of the involuntary "Thank God" that rose simultaneously to their lips.

"Dead!" she moaned, as Neal still kept his rigid posture. "Oh, Neal, he is dead. He lay here just as you are lying. I felt his dear cold face—I called him. Oh, you are warm ; your hands can feel. He could not. He did not hear me. I can remember now—Robert." She rose slowly and glanced about the room. Edna sprang forward and took hold of her arm.

"He is dead," she said again. "Neal, Robert is dead, and I am here. I am living, and he will never come back. Don't try to keep me—— Oh, Neal, dear, you were always good to me, you always understood. I can't stay without him. Let me go." She took a step forward but he caught her and drew her down on the couch.

"I am all alone," she said, and her lips quivered. "It was cruel, Neal, because—because we were not always happy. I want to tell him again that—that I was often wrong. Oh, Robert, darling. It was cruel. I want you—I want you—I can't—I can't." She could say no more, for a fit of uncontrollable weeping seized her. They hailed the attack with sensations of heartfelt relief and joy. Her reason was saved ; but, ere twelve hours had gone by, a new and unexpected cause for alarm presented itself. Brain fever developed, and for a time there were grave doubts entertained for her recovery. A trained nurse was hastily summoned from Nor-

wood, as well as two of the best physicians. Human skill was tried to the utmost and in the end triumphed, but the siege left its work on one of the watchers at least.

In Miss Penelope's opinion, Neal had aged ten years. She eyed his gray hairs and sunken cheeks with anxiety that frequently found vent in impatient expostulations. She saw no reason in his sitting up half the night, just to get hourly reports from the sick-room. She could not understand why he should leave his bed before dawn in order to catch the doctor during the latter's first call. Miss Penelope had a very wholesome reverence for devotion exhibited in either sex, but she was haunted by the fear that her nephew's health would have to pay for this excessive indulgence of his anxiety about Janet. In her own mind she felt perfectly sure that Janet would get well. Her faith in an all-wise Providence was too strong for her to entertain the belief that such a good man as her nephew was never to meet any tangible reward for his worth before he died. In her secret musings it was very natural that this expected reward should be identified with Janet—his soul's desire,—therefore, she knew that Janet would live, and, in some future day, Providence would rectify the blunders of the past. Be this as it may, however, Janet did recover, and the day came when she was able to leave her room and take her accustomed place in the house. People said that Mrs. Robert Cameron bore her husband's death with remarkable fortitude. She was very pale and thin, and her face was inexpressibly saddened, but she never forebore speaking of her bereavement, and she did so without visible emotion.

Neal alone realized the extent of her suffering. Neal alone perceived how keenly she was daily, hourly, reminded of Robert, by a thousand little reminiscences

constantly brought to her mind by this living on amid scenes intimately associated with their life together. As time went by, he determined to make a very bold proposition. Miss Penelope was first taken into his confidence and her consent won, and then, finding Janet alone one night, he broached the subject that had scarcely been out of his thoughts since the idea had suggested itself to him. Never before had he sought to learn her plans for the approaching winter, but she introduced this discussion by remarking that Mrs. Durward intended to leave her the following week and was anxious that she should close the house and, with Edna and the blind man, live somewhere in the village, for the winter at least.

"But oh, Neal," she continued, "how could I do that? It will be lonely here, but it is home."

"Yes," he agreed, "it is home, and you will appreciate it all the more if you leave it for a time. You've done nobly, bravely, staying on here, but your health demands a change. No, no, listen," he urged, as he saw her about to protest, "I'm not seconding your aunt's proposal. I've one of my own to offer and it will break me all up if you don't consent. You know the Morrisons. You remember you met them last winter. You always said you liked them particularly. Well, they are going to Europe. They are going to winter in Italy. Every two or three years they go over and rent a lovely old place right on the Mediterranean. Aunt Penelope is willing; she is terribly afraid of the voyage, but she'll go with us; and, Janet, think of how much good it would do you. Things can be managed so easily. Edna and your father can go to the homestead. I heard only the other day that Clarkson will take this house, furnished, for a year, and be glad to take it.

You——” but she interrupted him and for the first time since Robert’s death, he saw her smile.

“Neal, you used to express yourself very well, but it is difficult to understand what you mean by a jumble like that. What do you mean—in a few words——”

“Well, in a few words, you and I, and Aunt Penelope are going to Italy with the Morrisons. It is all settled, Janet. It is, honestly. Everything is arranged except your consent. Don’t withhold that, please. It is really imperative that you should have a change; a radical one. Dr. Lathrop says it will build you up wonderfully. It will do Aunt Penelope good, too, and——”

“What of yourself,” she interposed, gently. “You are growing old too fast, Neal. You give out too much sympathy. This plan of yours is very sudden. I don’t believe I want to go. People would expect me to enjoy, to be enthusiastic, and I have no enthusiasm. People will tell me that time is mighty to cure, and that we outlive these natural bereavements, but, Neal, it is not only that Robert is dead, it is the sickening feeling that I never did him any good; that all my old fond hopes had to die one by one—day by day. If he had lived, I would have buried more, because they kept rising. I was never able to attain to the condition of expecting nothing from him. I used to tell myself that I did, but I could not, because I loved him, and where there is love there must be a little faith. Oh, yes, the future was very easy to read. Every year would have been worse. He might have grown to hate me in the end. There were hours when he did hate me, because my mere presence reminded him of promises he was unable to keep. We will never speak of this again, Neal, dear friend. There is not a page

of my life you have not read. Your strength has cheered me, comforted me, sustained me, far more than you have ever realized. We won't talk again of my failure. It has sapped my self-confidence to the roots. I am not at all sure of what I can do. There is not the same firm ground under my feet, that I had years ago, when I undertook to save ennobled and strengthen a man whom God himself knew was doomed by the law of his own nature, but I intended to drive out Nature with love. Every wayward tendency was to be recalled by love. Oh, the wonders that love was to work—poor, weak love, made up of tears! Fate overthrew it in the struggle very easily. I am wiser now, Neal, and sadder. There don't seem to be the slightest spark of ambition left in me. I sometimes wish that it was necessary for me to earn my own living and father's as well, again, but there is the money. There seems to be plenty of money. There are ample means within my power, to use for good, but I seem to be indifferent. My own sufferings do not seem to bring other people's sufferings home to me. I am very apathetic really——”

“Because you are yet so weak,” he protested earnestly; “another strong argument in support of my plan. You are saddened and depressed naturally. Your experience has been a very bitter one. I anticipated it at the very outset. I have never been surprised, but I know you too well to believe that the disappointment has worked the havoc that you have described. It has crushed, but not killed. Wait. It is impossible that you should believe that you have accomplished all that you were put here to do.

“When your health is fully restored, you will look at life differently. Your disappointment, bitter as it has



been, is bound to be left behind. It is present with you now in terrible reality, but the mighty law of unceasing change is a very merciful one. You will not be able to defy it, any more than the rest of us." Once more Janet smiled faintly.

"Personally, Neal, are you desirous of taking this trip, or are you as usual thinking only of the benefit some one else might derive from it."

"No, I am more than anxious to go."

"Yes. Well, then we will go. I don't think it matters very much," she added as she saw his face brighten. "I want to do something to please you, but, Neal, what about Edna? I think I should be very uneasy to leave her with Aunt Lydia so long. You know we were anxious about her before—before the trouble. It seems as though it all happened in another century, but I recall enough to be apprehensive. I would not want to see her in Milly's place. It would be a great grief to me. Couldn't she go with us?"

"She could, of course, but for your Aunt Lydia; I spoke to her about it this morning; in fact she won't hear of it, and I fancy Mrs. Durward rarely changes her mind, but I think you can rest easy. He won't be here this winter. He's not here now, you know, and if they are bent on coming together, the Atlantic would not keep them apart. Try to realize that Edna is a woman with far more discernment in some matters, than you have yourself."

"Yes," she said, slowly, "no doubt you are right. I could not influence her. I don't know how she feels about him. I never understood her affair with Arnold Mainwaring. This falling in and out of love is a mysterious process to me. Neal," she broke off abruptly, while a tide of color tinged her pale face, "I

want to ask you one question, and then we will drop the subject forever : had—had Robert been where I feared that night and was that—was that the reason he strayed from the road and encountered Ezra Felton ? I would like to know.”

Neal glanced up quickly and his gaze fell on her hands, as they lay lightly pressed together in her lap. He knew so well what it cost her to seek this information. He realized the great effort she made to speak calmly and keep back the tears. He could not trust himself to answer in words, but she read in his face what she wanted to know and, after a moment, she rose and crossed the room. When she turned to him again, her self-possession had returned, but even her lips were white.

“I am going to say good-night,” she said, softly, with all an invalid’s want of ceremony. “We will go to Italy, Neal. I am almost glad to go. To-morrow we will talk about it. You will see Mr. Clarkson soon for me and we will be very business-like and settle things properly. You need not have worried about obtaining my consent. I have very little will of my own. I want you to think for me, Neal. I hope you will never get tired of the task.”

Happiness often owes much to comparison. To-day’s delight is magnified tenfold by the remembrance that we had to live through yesterday without it and may be called upon to do the same to-morrow.

Eight simple words from this woman whom he so passionately loved, sent Neal Fleming home that night with a lighter heart than he had carried for years.

*“I want you to think for me, Neal.”*

The request had filled him with the most extravagant responsibility. It inspired him with fresh zeal,

fresh courage, fresh hope. It was a privilege he would not have bartered for the wealth of the world. For was it not an unconscious acceptance of his guidance through this labyrinth of grief, in which she found herself.

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## CHAPTER XXXI.

As winter approached and settled down upon them, Edna found life at the homestead insupportably dull. The days were so much alike. Once a week they received their foreign mail. She was pleased to know that Janet was improving, but she could not bring Italy near enough to care particularly about her sister's descriptions of the people they met and the places they visited. It all seemed very far off and outside of herself.

Her grief for Milly's death was taking on the inevitable reactionary phase. She was still morbidly penitent, but, with her penitence and remorse, there occasionally crept in a feeling that her atonement might not, after all, have to stretch along such an infinite distance into the future. Some day, yet remote, she might permit herself to be happy. It was very hard to live and not know a little happiness. She felt that she would be satisfied with a very little. There was but one feature of this pleasant anticipation, however, that troubled her. Suppose this much craved condition of mind should only elect to come to her again through one source. Suppose Fate should decide that there was but one man living who had the power to procure it for her, what then? The question oppressed and tormented her unceasingly. Her anxiety to have it

settled grew daily more intense. In fancy, she devised a score of situations. In imagination, she listened to the most impassioned arguments and protestations, when memory brought his face before her and even his voice rang in her ears; but from each and all of these she escaped with a sense of victory. Proud, cold, and firm in her disdain of what he offered, it made her cheeks burn when she thought of what he was doubtless building upon for the future.

Every day that passed without bringing her the word that she knew was coming, made her realize his confidence.

He had no doubts or he would write.

Thus December and the holidays came and went.

One morning in January, inaction becoming unbearable, she donned a big cloak and a little fur cap and started for Randlemeade. Miss Randle had repeatedly urged her to come over and see her, but she kept away, because she had never been able to endure the thought of entering the house and being reminded of Milly at every turn. She expected that the first glimpse of those familiar rooms would be painful to her, but Miss Randle's volubility left her no opportunity to dwell upon the past.

"I really am delighted to see you," said the elder woman. "It is a positive treat, and morning calls are so informal. It has been very quiet here this winter. Of course we could not expect to be gay after two such recent deaths in the family. I have not minded it, though, and the Captain has borne up wonderfully. The dear man is at times almost jolly, but then, we are so congenial, we understand each other so well. He is never under the slightest restraint with me. That is such a comfort to him. I don't suppose you have heard

—I have positively refused to have it known yet, but my dear, it is impossible to put him off any longer. He's very impatient and I feel that it is cruel to delay."

"Delay?" said Edna, wonderingly, "you mean——"

"That we are to be married early in the spring," returned Miss Randle in accents of pride that she tried very hard to conceal. "As I say, it's simply impossible to refuse him any longer, and now that his mother is gone, and Milly dead, I really feel quite delicate about my position here. We expect Laurie home for a few days, to-morrow, and the Captain said this morning, 'Elinor, you certainly don't expect me to keep this from my son?' so I gave in and here I am as bad as he, for I've told you; but of course you won't spread it."

"No," said Edna, quickly, "I won't spread it;" but she was not thinking of Miss Randle's news. She was not looking at her companion's elated face. She was watching the big logs burning on the hearth at her feet, while she told herself that she was very glad she had come over here this morning. He would not take her unawares now.

"Laurie will be astonished," pursued that quavering, high-pitched voice. "Sons are always surprised when their fathers marry again, but Oliver really needs me. You would not believe how careless that dear man is about himself; I have to be so watchful. If I were not here, I am perfectly sure he'd never think of red flannels from one year's end to another. He often says to me—'Elinor, darn red flannels.' He don't say darn; but that's what he means. Oh, I know him so well—all the little swear words he uses are so harmless. Really, I am quite used to them. I think, my dear, I would miss them. He uses them so very energetically

—so very—very positively at times and they are so perfectly meaningless, as I tell him. Now it always made Laurie angry. Laurie's temper was never good. Poor boy, I suppose he dreads to come back. People did say such unkind things and his dear father was so put out. Of course it was dreadful, Milly's taking it as she did, but he looked so terrible at the funeral, I've thought since that perhaps we were deceived. Then, his not coming back all this time. I really hope you didn't care very much. There—there—I know I'm too outspoken. Oliver will insist that I am—but——”

“Oh, no,” said Edna, quickly, though her color deepened, “I don't mind. I know what people say—it's public property. I dare say everybody understands the—the affair, a great deal better than we do. I don't expect them to forget so soon. If they never do, it does not matter. Perhaps I won't live here all my life——”

“Perhaps you won't,” said Miss Randle, musingly.

The remainder of Edna's stay was devoted to remarks on the coming marriage, and the topic was by no means exhausted when the girl rose to go. Miss Randle pressed her to repeat the visit. Laurie would certainly not remain more than a few days. He disliked the place so cordially in winter. There was no reason why she could not come over often, after he was gone again, and Edna agreed that there was no reason, with the silent reservation that she would probably never again enter the house.

Her call had been productive of far more information than she had hoped to obtain. The long-expected hour was so close at hand, that she recoiled with a shiver of dread and began, with all a woman's inconsistency, to wonder how she could avoid meeting it.

Fifty times during the winter Laurie had assured

himself that he had suffered enough to atone for every crime in the calendar.

"Why, then," he asked, "should he hold out any longer? Why should he prolong this torturing silence?" He only wanted one or two words. He would be satisfied with one glimpse of her face. He would not expect or presume to ask for more yet. He thought he was deserving of much commendation for not having written. It was the severest penance that he could impose upon himself and he felt that he had lived up to the idea most courageously. He tried to believe that he still bitterly mourned Milly's death.

He never thought now that he had once planned to deprive her of everything that had made life worth living. He had calmly set about killing all but the body; and when a stronger and more merciful hand than his had interposed and checked the complete fulfilment of his meditated cruelty, he converted Death's kindness into an action to be deplored.

He knew that Randlemeade would remind him of her, but he could not help being haunted by another's face here, in these rooms that were so identified with the past that they had shared. He had a long talk with his father after dinner. Notwithstanding the fact that for years he had been looking forward to the Captain's one day marrying the woman who sat at the head of his table, he was a little surprised when the probability was stated to him as an actual coming occurrence.

"Yes, sir," affirmed the old man, warming to the subject, over his wine, "there are worse women in this world than Elinor Randle. She comes pretty near being a fool at times, but I'd rather live with a fool than a knave. I can read and manage a fool, but a knave has wit enough to circumvent you. Circumstances

forced us to live under the same roof, and, by Jove, sir, I am not the man to compromise a woman. People expect me to marry her, and marry her I will."

"I would, by all means," remarked his son, with languid interest. "She has studied your rheumatism and temper to good purpose; it is the best thing you can do."

"Indeed! Well, may I inquire what you intend to do, now that that poor little woman's money belongs to you? Are you going to galivant around the world, and fritter it away, or settle down somewhere and double it."

"I don't know, I am sure," said his son, indifferently; "I have small ambition to double it."

"Ambition! Your ambition was always a difficult thing to lay your fingers on. However, lost or spent, the money is your own. I suppose you've come back to put the proper climax on that disgraceful affair. Doubtless you mean to marry the girl. She's here, waiting for you. All the others are in Europe."

"So I understand. I will marry her, certainly, if she will have me," said Laurie, with more animation than he had yet shown, but he made his escape a moment or two later. It cut him keenly to have the Captain speak slightly of Edna. He would take her away, he mused, as he sought the studio and shut himself in with his thoughts and his cigar. He almost wished that she had gone to Italy. No painful memories would have stood between them there; memories that must, for a long time, linger about this place. Could she have feared that he would not follow her? He could not tell how she would greet him after their separation. He could not imagine what she had been doing or thinking during the past few months, but he loved to dwell on the fact that she was here close at hand, but one short mile across the snowy fields. Surely she



would welcome a change. He did not believe that she had any outside diversion. It was too soon and she was too keenly alive to what had been said of her. But he would make it all up to her. He would make her forget, and she should have everything in the world that she desired.

Laurie had never dreamed that their first meeting would occur on the main street of the town. It was a moment of supreme embarrassment for them both, as they stood awkwardly looking at each other, people passing and re-passing close beside them. He had just been buying some white roses that he intended to send over to the homestead, with a little note. He held the flowers closely bound in the tell-tale white tissue paper without thinking of them until she betrayed an unmistakable intention of walking away from him.

"Let me walk with you a little way. These roses are for you; I'll carry them," he added, as she drew back. "I've got to talk to you. I intended to come over this afternoon. Don't look so frightened."

"Frightened?" she echoed with a strange little catch in her voice, "I'm not frightened. Come with me? Certainly, if you want to, but, Laurie, don't offer me these flowers. I would not take them for the world."

"Why won't you take them?" he began, hastily, then, with a resolute determination to control himself, he continued, more calmly :

"I know how you feel, Edna. Oh, yes, I know all about it. You think it's too soon—and perhaps it is—I didn't mean to bother you to-day. I'll wait—I'll——"

"Wait?" she interrupted. "Oh, Laurie, you won't get anything by waiting. Don't let us talk on the street. Come with me. You must understand me. You must not go away again with a wrong idea. Aunt Lydia is

in Norwood. Come home with me and I will tell you."

He looked at her stupidly.

"I certainly don't understand you," he said, but she refused to be more explicit, and it was not until they reached the house and she had gone around and unlocked the front door for him and invited him into the cold, cheerless parlor, that she could be induced to make her meaning clear. She would not let him take off his overcoat, because he would freeze, she said, and she sat down on the sofa with her fur cape well up around her throat. He noticed nothing of this. He only saw her white face and wonderful eyes, so inscrutable in expression as they met his own impassioned gaze. In all his dreams he had never seen her thus. In the days when she had defied him the most, he felt that she had been nearer to him than she was now, sitting there so close to his chair, that he had only to bend forward and he could have taken her in his arms.

"Oh," she said, breaking the silence that had fallen upon them, "I really was afraid, before I saw you, that I might care. I was afraid I had not gotten over it, but, it is gone and I am so delighted, because, you see, it was bound to last such a little while. You are not a bit better than I am. I should always have known that; and I think it is dreadful if a woman cannot respect her husband. Now, you can talk as much as you like, it will make no difference. I'm not afraid of what you can say. You can't say any more than you have said. I know it all. It won't influence me to hear it again, only, don't get angry, Laurie—remember—she hears us. Be just—as I am, and—and I don't think you had better stay long. I know you're cold."

"Cold," he repeated, huskily—"Edna—Great God! What are you trying to tell me? Don't tease me, not

now. I can't bear it. I didn't mean to talk of this to-day. I know it's too soon, but you began it. I won't ask you till you give me leave, but, for God's sake, don't talk of not caring. Don't send me away with such words ringing in my ears. You must care. You did a little while ago and nothing has changed except——"

"Except that we killed her!" she said, bitterly. "Do you suppose I will ever forget that?"

"Yes, I think you will."

"Well, I won't. Oh, Laurie, I don't want to forget it. I am sorry for you, really I am, but I can't marry you. I would always think of her. No woman will ever love you as she did. They will love you for a little while, but—they'll get tired. I was fond of you when it was wicked to be, and now that you are free, I can't love you. You have plenty of money. You don't care for this country. Why don't you go to Europe? You like it there. I know perfectly well that if I send you away, I'm going to be left alone. I used to have a perfect horror of being an old maid, but I don't seem to care now—I——"

"Stop!" he said, roughly. "Don't go rambling off like that. I can't follow you. Listen. I suppose you think you have settled this thing, but you will understand after a time that you have not. You don't know what you are asking me to do. You belong to me; you are everything in this world to me and you say that I am to leave the only thing under Heaven I want. You'll get over these feelings. They are natural, I suppose—I mean about—about Milly. I am not such a scoundrel as you think. I would have saved her. I was wild for her to live, because I felt that if she died, I was the cause. It wasn't her fault that I met you,

and never knew a moment's peace afterward. Heavens! what you made me suffer! How you played with me before—before I kept my word to her! How you goaded and taunted and deceived me and made me love you ten times more furiously than ever, and now—and now——” he paused, for the words stuck in his throat.

“I knew you'd make a scene,” she said, wearily, “and oh, Laurie, to save my life, I can't feel anything more than pity for you. Do you want me to say that I love you, when I don't and never want to. I don't know where it has gone. I suppose it was the wrong kind of love in the beginning, or that I am one of those kind of women that are inconstant by nature. I can't help it. I am sorry for you, as I say, but what can I do? You say I deceived you once. Perhaps I did. I've done lots of wicked things during the last two or three years. You don't want me to deceive you again. Now go home, or you will be frozen stiff. We never have company, so Aunt Lydia doesn't allow this sacred apartment to be desecrated by a fire. Oh, Laurie, really I wish you would be sensible. I tell you, you would get tired of me in a short time. Aunt Lydia says my faults are more pronounced than ever. Down in your heart of hearts, you don't respect me—you can't, and I would know that—and——” she paused, for her listener had risen abruptly to his feet. She could see his hand tremble as he took his hat from the sofa beside her.

“I won't say any more,” he began, hurriedly, “not now, but you can't prevent my hoping. I'll go away. I was mad to—to try so soon, but it seemed impossible to stay away any longer. But, before I go, make me one promise. If you change, if you ever feel the slightest desire to see me, write; I will send you an

address where a letter would surely reach me, wherever I may be. Will you promise?"

"Yes, I will promise, but,"—she added dismally, as she saw his expression change—"really I cannot hold out the slightest hope of your ever getting such a letter, if the letter is to mean only one thing. I might want to see you, but only as a friend."

"Don't talk to me of friends," he interjected. "You and I can never be friends."

"No, I suppose not. Well, what are we—certainly not enemies?"

"No, not that. There is no question about what I am, however, and it's something I'll always be unless some other man steps in—and—by Heavens!—even that wouldn't stop me. But"—he added in a softer tone as she drew away from him a little—"there is no one else—you are not sending me off because—because——"

"No," she cried, hastily, "honestly, there is not." She gave him her hand and he extended his, but with a quick movement she placed a chair part way between them.

"Nothing else?" he said in a low tone, "nothing else to live on, till I can come back? I won't touch you. Don't be afraid of me, but I never thought you could be so cruel."

She laughed nervously and advanced a step from behind the chair. "It is too cold to be sentimental," she said, lightly; "besides, we are nothing to each other now, and lax as my principles were in the past, I had something to stand on then."

"You have lost nothing that you had then."

"You are wrong," was her hasty rejoinder, "I've lost the desire to be nice to you for my own sake."

And those were the words that he took away with him. These were the words that sent him groping in dull despair across the fields towards home. Oh, how wrong it had been to seek her prematurely! Why had he not curbed his impatience? Why had he not given her at least six months?

He packed his valise with feverish impatience. The place tortured him. He cared nothing for what his father thought of his abrupt departure. Forty-eight hours was all that he could bear. He would get away and let Hope have a chance to gather to itself a little strength. It had not been killed, but it was sorely wounded.

Moreover, there had been something in her face that followed him. For many long days he had not read such steadfast determination in her beautiful eyes and he had never noticed the strength about her mouth before. Milly's death had certainly changed her.

He never thought of the roses until the vessel that was bearing him once more to Europe was two days out on her trip. He had left them on the table in that cold parlor. He wondered what she would do with them.

Miss Durward sniffed their fragrance immediately upon entering the house on that eventful morning. Edna was superintending the midday dinner and stood by the kitchen table, serenely directing Anthony as he cut and slashed feebly at a panful of potatoes before him, when Mrs. Durward came out of her bedroom holding aloft the roses.

"Where did these come from?" she inquired, briefly.

"Those, Aunt Lydia, are from Allan's. They are for Milly. I am going to take them over this afternoon. They won't live long in the snow, but she will see them."

"Do you mean to tell me that you wasted money on such nonsensical sentiment?"

"Oh, no, I didn't buy them. Her husband did. He is home on a visit. He left them here. He was here a little while ago."

"Indeed, why didn't he take them to the grave himself?"

"Perhaps it was too cold," she said, indifferently.

"How long is he going to stay?"

"I have no idea."

"Well, Edna, for Heaven's sake, remember what folks will say if you allow him to come poking around here so soon. If he hasn't sense enough, you'll have to teach him, or I will."

"Oh, you need not be alarmed. He won't."

But Mrs. Durward was alarmed. The roses upset her and she was heartily relieved when she heard a few days later that Laurie Cameron had sailed for Europe.

It seemed to Edna that spring would never come. Never in her life had she known a winter to be so long. She could not find anything to interest her. Sewing she abominated, and books had lost their charm since the only books that she had read were novels, and they always dwelt on the same old topic.

As the weather settled a little, she began to spend much of her time out of doors. She had never cared about taking long walks, but they diverted her now, and she grew daily more astonished to perceive the distance that she could cover without fatigue.

These rambles very often lay along the old shore road. The loneliness of the scene suited her mood. The ocean had never spoken to her before. She had never understood what it could tell and the discovery of its hitherto hidden language interested her deeply.

Some days she would hear Milly's voice in the waves as they washed gently over the sand some distance from the cliff. It was such a soft, soothing voice without a mournful note in its sweet song. Rest and Peace, Forgiveness and Love, were the only themes it interpreted, but it gave to each a world of beautiful new meanings.

There was a particular spot, that it became her habit to seek frequently. A bit of sheltered rock where she could sit and listen to the waves and look seaward and think as she had never in her life thought before.

Her reveries were seldom, if ever, interrupted. She never paid any attention to the occasional sea-lovers who, attracted like herself, wandered in her neighborhood; therefore she scarcely looked up one afternoon, as a man's form slowly mounted the cliff and then stood but a few feet from her retreat, gazing unheedingly seaward. Carelessly, at last, she raised her eyes and sent him an indifferent glance, but that one glance converted indifference into burning interest, for the man was Arnold Mainwaring. Though trembling violently, she kept her seat in the shadow until some uncontrollable impulse made her rise and move in his direction. He heard her approach, and turning, their eyes met. She was the first to recover her self-possession.

"I—I did not know you were here in Causauqua," she faltered.

"No?" he said, following the interrogation with no word of explanation, for the reason that speech failed him. He himself was unconscious of the fixity of his gaze—in reality it was only the briefest space of time that they stood thus, looking into each other's faces, but to her it seemed interminable. She felt that those grave eyes saw more than her features. They



were piercing her soul and remarking the self-inflicted misery and guilt that it had passed through during the months of his absence. The corners of her mouth twitched. She was painfully sensible of an hysterical desire to laugh, but still he stood irresponsively distant, with that same, strange, mute, eager questioning expression upon his countenance.

She did not know that it was the gaze of a man long famished for a sight of an idolized object. She did not know what it meant to him to be thus near enough to touch her.

What was there to say? Nothing, that had not been said before. She was the one woman in the world to him—and he was a dismissed and unwanted factor in her life. She had explained that to him once in words, and twice by letter since.

She had taught him the truth by forcible repetition. She had literally ground the fact into his understanding. It was present with him now in all its grim reality. He was not trying to get away from it. He had ceased the struggle long ago, but he was nevertheless tingling with suppressed joy at the encounter.

"Have you," she inquired, finally, advancing a little, "have you been here long?"

"Here? Well, not in this particular spot. I've been in town three days."

"Three days!—Did you come on business?"

"Yes."

"About your property?"

"No."

"Then what did you come for. Oh, Arnold, you—you were not always so uncommunicative."

"Uncommunicative?" he said, with a start. "I don't mean to be mysterious. There's no mystery

about my visit. It's connected with a lawsuit. I was summoned and the case is being tried here."

"Oh," she said, slowly, "is it—an interesting one?"

"No. Edna, I—I want to tell you how awfully sorry I was—I mean I am—about—about your sister's trouble. I met one of the Paine boys in Denver, shortly after it occurred, and got all the particulars. I wanted to write to you but I—I didn't."

"No, you certainly didn't," she said, going a step nearer. "Did you feel sorry for me?—You heard about Milly's death, too, and—you imagined the—the cause. You—you know just what I did. I suppose you believed it and felt thankful that you had escaped marrying a woman who could be so—so wicked. I'm trying to make up for it now that it is too late, really I am. I'm glad to have you know it. I have wanted you to know it. Of course it all lies behind me. It is terrible to think it will always be there. I've only to think and it comes jumping into the present. That is what makes it so terrible to do wrong. We can never get away from the memory of it."

"It is a form of punishment," he said, briefly, and then he turned the subject. He felt that in another moment she would speak of Laurie Cameron, and he could not endure the sound of the man's name. "Your sister," he went on, "is she recovering from the shock?"

"In a measure, yes. The trip has benefited her more, Neal writes, than she herself realizes. Of course she's not the same. She is very quiet and sad and patient, and just as near being an angel as she can be. I'll be afraid of her, I know I will, when she comes back. Such awfully good people affect me that way, somehow—but"—she cried, abruptly—"see how late

it is. I must think of home. Where are you staying?"

"With the Kilgours—or at least I was there last night and the night before—Tuesday I was at home."

"I don't suppose you meant to come and see me?"

"No," he said, and left the cold negative without polite qualification.

She started and walked on a few steps, almost hurriedly, while he kept at her side. Once or twice she stole a glance at his face. He had changed very little, she thought, but she found herself wondering why she had once considered him so plain. Of course he was very awkward, and he still had the old trick of swinging his arms and carrying his tall form loosely—so to speak—a want of grace that had often irritated her in the past, but all this comforted her now. It gave her the impression that he had not gone so far away from her, that he would understand her and be kind to her, and pity her, just as he had done on the night that she had sent him from her. She told herself that she needed just such a friend as Arnold could be. Of course he did not love her any, he must have gotten over that, but she believed that his interest in her was still strong enough to make him willing to listen to her and advise her. Perhaps he would tell her what she could do with her life; suggest some way to enliven the dead monotony of the awful days that yet stretched between her and Janet's return. A hundred confused thoughts struggled to find expression before they reached the street, when he would leave her, but her sudden longing to unburden herself to him, was unappeased when the time came for them to separate. She put out her hand as they paused for a moment on the corner, and he took it and held it closely for a brief instant only. The action emboldened her!

"If you are not going to be busy to-night—if you are not going anywhere else, will you come over for a little while? I want to talk to you," she continued, nervously. "I want to tell you about—about—oh, a dozen things. Will you come?"

"Certainly, if you wish it." His tone was perfectly even. There was not the slightest quiver of pleasure in it, but the fact did not dawn upon her until she had gained her own room and could think and reason more connectedly. She had spent many sorrowful hours in this close, narrow, little room, with its sloping ceiling and its one, small dormer window, but past experience had offered her nothing more bitter than she was called upon to endure at the present moment as she reviewed her recent conversation. What had possessed her? Why had she asked him to call when he had so unmistakably and politely shown her that he had no desire to resurrect even their early friendship, much less any warmer feeling.

What had become of her pride? What wild fancy had made her believe that he had the slightest interest in what she did, or wanted to do? How could she expect any man, especially such a man, to find her worthy of consideration after knowing what she had done? and Arnold did know, from certain letters she had written, a great deal that had been indiscreet and uncalled-for, with a view to keeping him away and showing him at the same time how foolish it was for him to speculate about her future. She had succeeded—oh, how well she had succeeded. What did she want to tell him to-night? What could she tell him when he would only sit and look at her, and perhaps say "yes" and "no" occasionally. His sympathy was dead and she was hungry for it. By her own deeds she had killed it and now

with a few words, a few miserable words, she had thought to imbue it with new life. She wished with all her heart that she had not met him. His appearance had gathered together the loose ends of her vague longings and merged all into the certain realization of what she had unconsciously and for weeks back, been hoping for—almost expecting. Stretched forlornly, face downward, across the foot of her bed, she lay torturing herself with conjectures. The room grew dark. She heard Mrs. Durward moving about in the kitchen below. Anthony had just come in with the milk. Supper would be ready in a few minutes and she would have to get up and pretend to eat, and tell where she had been, and explain that Arnold was coming later. She knew how this piece of news would be received, and her cheeks burned. They would not dream that she had urged him to come.

They would have to think that she had refused him again, and Mrs. Durward would tell her a certain horrible story about a very pretty girl who had lived in Norwood once with a reputation for breaking hearts and sending suitors away out of sheer vanity and perverseness. This same girl was a miserable old crone in the work-house now, husbandless and deserted, a living, authentic warning, as forcible as any that Mrs. Durward's imagination could provide.

Utterly disheartened, she rose at last to a sitting posture and caught a faint outline of her face in an opposite mirror, a mere shadowy outline, but it seemed to give her an idea. She looked ill; and ill she proposed to be. Arnold could come and go, she would not see him. Food, she knew, would choke her. Going to the hall—she leaned over the stair-rail and called to her aunt. A very few words put Mrs. Durward in posses-

sion of the facts, but, as usual, she wanted them elaborated. Accordingly, after Edna had gone back to her room, she promptly ascended to that apartment and asked a few questions. What was the sense of lying there in the dark? Who ever heard of a cup of good tea hurting one's head?

If Arnold came she would explain matters, certainly, but for her part she thought it not decently polite to let a man walk two miles and not even ask him to sit down at the end of his journey.

Edna felt that she had never realized before how deadly quiet this place was.

She heard the clock strike seven and she wondered how long she would have to lie there before she could go to sleep. She was listening intently—she knew that she would hear him the moment he stepped on the porch, but, though she was expecting the sound, her heart gave a sudden leap when it at last assailed her ears. Bounding from the bed, she crept to the hall. Mrs. Durward was already unfastening the door, and then the usual greetings were interchanged. She heard her aunt apologize and account for her absence. She strained her ear to catch what he said. It was something very polite and very meaningless. He would not come in—oh, no. Mrs. Durward's next inquiry was inaudible, but his reply made her catch her breath. This was his last night in Causauqua. He was going down to Atlantic City by the first train in the morning.

Had Atlantic City been situated in the heart of Africa the intelligence that he was bound for that interesting spot could not have filled her with greater terror. She caught hold of the stair-rail and waited, motionless, till the door closed, then rushed back to her room, barely alive to what she was about to do. She seized

an ulster from the closet, grabbed her hat, and in one minute had noiselessly let herself out of the house. She knew the way he would go, and with flying feet she pursued his retreating figure. Breathless, with no thought of what she meant to say, she gained upon him, till at length he turned.

"It is I,"—she called out, hurriedly. "I—I didn't know you were going away so—so soon. I wanted to— to see you and——"

Swiftly lessening the space between them, he seized her hands and tried to read her face in the darkness.

"Do you know what this means?" he began, under his breath. "Do you know the thought that you are putting into my head? I'm—I'm not strong enough to grapple with it again——"

"No—no, I don't want you to,"—she cried, hysterically. "Oh, Arnold—don't let yourself get so far away. I was so glad to see you, I—I wanted to talk to you. I wanted to tell you—that I am all alone, and I need—I need——"

"Where is he, now?" he asked, in a strained voice.

"Oh, I don't know—in Europe, Asia or dead. It don't matter. He will always be there—always. I mean it. I wanted to tell you about that—about—about his going—and you would not let me. You were so cold, so—so silent. You frightened me—you were never so before——"

"Cold?"—he faltered in astonishment. "Cold?—How little you know. I'm in a dream now.—Make—make the waking easy. Do you mean by all this that—that I need not go away to-morrow?"

"Oh, if you only wouldn't!" the words were very softly spoken but he caught them. Still he held her hands; still he tried to search her face, as though he

dared not believe what she was giving him to understand.

"I could not stay," he said, softly, "unless——"

"Unless?" she repeated.

"Unless you can tell me what I long ago gave up expecting to hear."

"I will tell you anything," she whispered, and then in the darkness, almost within a stone's throw of the window where Mrs. Durward sat, unconscious of what was going on, she promised again to give him what, long ago, it had seemed so hard to relinquish.

The ring of truth in her voice made him delirious with happiness. His love was so deep and true and generous, the natural outgrowth of a strong broad nature, that it lay within his power to banish the past and the memories arising therefrom.

A full hour passed before she would consent to go into the house, but during that hour as they sat close together on the steps of the porch, she opened to his view the one miserable, sinful chapter of her life. She forced him to read it all from the beginning to the end. It was a supreme moment—the effects of which they both felt as long as they lived.

The respect that she had always entertained for him became intensified, and with it sprang up a feeling that might almost have been called veneration.

With such sponsors love was bound to have a pure and happy growth.



## CHAPTER XXXII.

THE travellers returned in June.

At the sight of her home, Miss Penelope's spirits rose at once. Everything pleased her: even the simple expectation of getting back to her own bed was worthy of remark. She acknowledged herself impressed on all sides by the transcendental superiority of American ways, American cooking, American manners and American people, over all foreign institutions.

Neal listened to her eulogies with a rueful countenance. It made him think of what she must have endured to be separated from those fancied luxuries. Still when he looked at her bright eyes, and heard the cheerful ring in her voice, and further observed the energy manifested in her manner of attacking her household duties, he consoled himself with the thought of how much good the change had accomplished for her too. Janet went immediately to the homestead, for her tenants had taken her house for another year.

To say that she was pleased to find Arnold Mainwaring reinstalled in Edna's favor and again an openly accepted lover, very inadequately described her feeling on the subject.

No one but Neal knew what a weight was lifted from her mind. The wedding was fixed for the first of July. Mrs. Durward overruled the idea of having a simple ceremony in the church, and in the end Edna consented to being married at the homestead.

Janet did her share in the preparations with heartfelt thankfulness that something was given her to do. Her father, too, soon put forward his old claims upon her time and speedily dropped the habit of caring for himself which he had of necessity adopted under his sister's roof. He was fretful and exacting, as he had ever been, but she took up the old burden bravely.

They talked to her a great deal about her house, what she should do with the property and the utter impracticability of her expecting to go there and live with her father alone, but she arrived at no settlement of the question till one day Arnold astonished her by offering to buy the place. He intended to resume his law practice in Norwood. Edna would like the house and it was certainly large enough for them all. He wanted her to live with them if she would, and she was touched by his evident sincerity. She took a week to consider the idea. The day before the wedding she gave them her answer. The papers were signed and the house that had been the scene of her greatest happiness and keenest suffering was hers no longer. Edna was delighted over Arnold's plan of travelling for a year. He wanted to settle his affairs in the West, and at the same time show her something of the country. They might even take a trip to Japan before they returned to settle down. Any number of entrancing possibilities were discussed for their honeymoon.

The excitement of the wedding was over at last, and the desolation of having nothing to do or to plan entered into Janet's days.

It was then that little Miss Penelope proposed that she should come to them for the remainder of the summer. She would be happier there than with her aunt. She could have Milly's old room and Neal would al-

ways be ready to talk to her and read to her. She could do for her father just the same and see as much of him as she desired, and Janet had accepted the invitation.

She did not nurse her grief over her husband's death, but there were hours, and at times, whole days, when she would creep away by herself and succumb to the force and sting of regret and longing that could not be put aside. These were Neal's blue days. He always recognized their approach and withdrew in a measure till they had passed. He was so morbidly fearful of jarring upon her.

He had learned the stern lesson of self-control, which, with his marvellous power of anticipating her needs, made him an ideal companion. Where she was weak, he was strong. One word from him, and a wavering opinion was definitely pushed to the one side or the other. His decided methods of thought braced her like a tonic, till she grew to look to him for encouragement and advice with almost pathetic humility and faith. This peculiar form of dependence had always existed back of her apparent decision and strength of character.

The year was not without a certain peace and calm content, different from anything that she had ever experienced before. When she wanted to be employed, Miss Penelope was invariably equal to the demand. When she craved to be alone, no one intruded or questioned her; moreover, they caused her to feel that her presence in the house was an absolute pleasure, and she grew tenderly attached to the big, cool rooms that had become such a haven of rest. She saw her father daily and made a point of walking with him whenever he could be coaxed to take the exercise. She visited

Anthony in his little attic sanctum, just as she had done before her marriage. His childishness never wearied her. She was ever ready to listen to him. Her love and tenderness colored his life. He cared for nothing else, and as, day by day, he slipped deeper and deeper into the benumbed condition of old age, he leaned more heavily upon her sympathy. The one remaining thought that his poor old tired brain could clearly seize out of the mist of fading ideas, was Janet. All the happiness that he had ever known was centered in that name.

Meanwhile Edna wrote long, bright, happy letters in which sundry extravagant adjectives were always employed.

Arnold was a hero in the guise of a quiet, unobtrusive, yielding husband. She was fully alive to the fact that he was immeasurably too good for her, she said.

Janet always read these letters aloud to Neal. - She knew instinctively that Edna did not stand very high in his estimation, and she was eager for him to realize what time and the companionship of a right-minded man was accomplishing for her.

Neal had been to New York for a few days on business connected with the publication of a series of articles that he had written the year before in Italy, and returned just before the holidays.

Miss Penelope was just lamenting the fact that they would have to pass Christmas Eve without him, when he returned and burst into the room where they sat, his coat frosted with snow and his face glowing with the exercise of a hurried tramp from the station. In spite of his protests, Miss Penelope rushed to get his slippers, and then after wheeling up the big chair to the fire, they

settled themselves, one on each side of him, and invited him to talk.

"Nothing has happened here," said Miss Penelope, encouragingly, "except this." She left her seat, and seizing a small package from the table, held it irresolutely in both hands.

"The Captain's usual offering, I suppose," said Neal, with a laugh. "Come, let us open it; you've forgiven him, you know."

But Miss Penelope still hesitated.

"I'm not sure," she affirmed, sinking into her chair again, and dropping the parcel in her lap. "Of course, as I told Janet, this afternoon, when the thing came over as usual, I do think a little better of him. For one reason, he has married that extraordinary relative of his, and, then, he did feel badly about Milly; I can't forget that."

"Don't try," suggested Neal, as she paused. "Put an end to the long warfare. Open the package and then write him a nice little note and see how much more comfortable you will feel. It's the only hobby that you have ever ridden, but you have had a long meaningless ride. Let me see you get off—come, here is my knife, cut the string and the past together."

"Of course it's all nonsense to you," began Miss Penelope, in an aggrieved tone, "but I remember how shamefully he acted about those boys. He was to blame for—for—but of course it's unchristian like, and as I say he's redeemed himself a little."

"Undoubtedly—shall I?" Neal extended his hand, but her fingers were already twisting off the string that bound the mysterious gift.

There was no drawing back now. Curiosity, long smothered, rose in its might and in another moment

three pair of eyes were gazing at a most beautiful little miniature encircled with jewels.

"Your Aunt Helen," burst forth Miss Penelope eagerly. "Oh, isn't it so like her! He had it done in Europe. This is the one. And to think during all these years the number of times I've had it in my hands and not known it."

"How much it resembles Laurie," said Neal, "and, by the way, do you know he's back in New York again? He arrived Saturday and, by the oddest chance, I ran across him. He has commissioned me to pack and ship his studio fittings. He is going to fit up some sort of a den in town, I believe."

"How did he look?" asked Miss Penelope, guardedly.

"Fairly well."

"Had he heard of Edna's marriage?"

"Oh, yes, he spoke of it."

Miss Penelope made no further inquiries then, but an hour or so later when she found herself alone with Neal she resumed the subject of Laurie's presence in New York.

"How do you think he took the affair?" she asked. "What did he say to you?"

"He was very bitter. I don't think he was in the least prepared for it. I don't know what he means to do."

"Some designing woman will get hold of him, mark my words," remarked Miss Penelope, prophetically. "He's never been free from an entanglement of some sort since he left college, and before, for aught I know. Poor boy, he must be awfully lonesome. Seeing Helen's picture makes me feel sorry for him, somehow. I hope, however, he won't come back here, at least not to stay."

"There is no fear," said Neal, shortly. "He abominates the place and won't even return to look after his own things."

By the first of May the people who had rented Janet's former home left, and she and Neal were free to go over to the house and prepare it for the newcomers.

She was amazed at the tranquillity of spirit during this first revisiting of familiar and suggestive scenes. Miss Penelope was loath to lose her and she had consented to remain with them for some time to come and she thought it would be as well to give Edna an opportunity to learn the duties of a home-maker by practical experiment.

Edna and Arnold's arrival and settlement made a little break in their lives, but after a few weeks, affairs went on again as usual.

Janet's manner had changed as much as Neal had dared to hope. He had not looked forward to being able to chase the sadness entirely from her face. He knew that a certain far-away look in the eyes would always remain, but he realized that she had reached a condition peculiarly peaceful and contented. It was this that troubled him. He feared that she was entirely contented, and he dared not disturb her. It was this feeling that kept him silent while the weeks merged into months and the months crept on to the completion of another year. Her manner towards him was so entirely unconscious, so friendly, there was such a powerful suggestion of sisterly affection in her treatment that he was often maddened by the thought of the futility of his hopes. At times he dared not trust himself to talk to her. There were moments when he felt that she must be absolutely blind not to read his secret. As the second year of her stay with them drew near

its end, he began to avoid her. Every day added to his nervousness. One unguarded word might drive her to leave them and as yet she had made no plans. Under pretense of working, he often spent his evenings in his study.

With the door ajar he could hear her talking to Miss Penelope in the room beyond. Every idle sentence was treasured. Her laugh was sweeter to him than any music in the world.

With his shaded lamp turned low, he sat, one night, listening as usual. He had not even tried to write. The voices in the sitting-room soon grew fainter, and at last ceased. He heard footsteps on the stairs and with a quiver of regret, decided that Janet had retired without saying "good-night." He rose from his chair and stood looking down upon his disordered desk. A light footfall behind, caused him to turn suddenly.

"I—I thought you had gone upstairs—" he began, awkwardly.

"No, it was Aunt Penelope," she answered. "I want to talk to you. May I—here?"

"Surely—if you'll be comfortable. Take this chair."

"This one is all right. Neal, do you know that tomorrow is the thirtieth of April?" He was not looking at her, so he did not observe the strange expression on her face.

Pushing his chair violently back against his desk he simply said that he knew the date and its portent.

"Well," she resumed, locking her fingers together, as she always did under stress of excitement. "I do not care to—to go away. Do you want me to stay?"

"Do I want you to stay?" he murmured, incoherently.

"Do you?" she went on slowly, "do you want me to stay always?"



He bounded to his feet. "I—I haven't complained! I understood how you felt. I never meant to worry you? but Aunt Penelope knew, of course. She has told you." He paused and was searching her face with a wildly-beating heart. Something he read there almost terrified him. He sank down in his chair.

"She did not have to tell me. I knew," said Janet, under her breath. "I knew, Neal. I felt that you cared. When I first realized it, months ago, I felt that I would have to go away. Then—then as time passed, I thought more and more about it and I found that—that I did not want to go. You are so much more to me than you realize. Life would be a very empty thing without you now. I appreciate the feeling that kept you silent, but it was more than I could bear to see you slipping away like this because—because——"

"Because," he interrupted eagerly—"all my strength was oozing away. I was helpless. The moment you came near me I was powerless to conceal my love, and it would take me the rest of my life to tell you all—but—but this isn't pity, Janet? Don't deceive yourself. I've been hungry, starved so long, pity wouldn't do. Be very sure, Janet. I don't expect all now, dear, only the spirit that will mean love in the end. Oh! my darling, tell me in words—in words—just what I have to build upon."

Transformed by the force of his emotions, he startled her as he bent forward and caught her hand.

"Do you care so much as this?" she said, in a low, frightened tone. "Oh, Neal, how selfish I have been! I—I don't feel as you do. My feeling is one of rest—security. I cannot explain it. It seems as though I had been hunting all my life for something and had just found it. You are so strong, so brave, so good.

I turn to you, I need you. Will you take me? will you teach me? will you show me the work that I should do? Give me some of your courage and strength. I don't feel for you as I did for Robert—not exactly—but you would not have me, would you? I want you to understand."

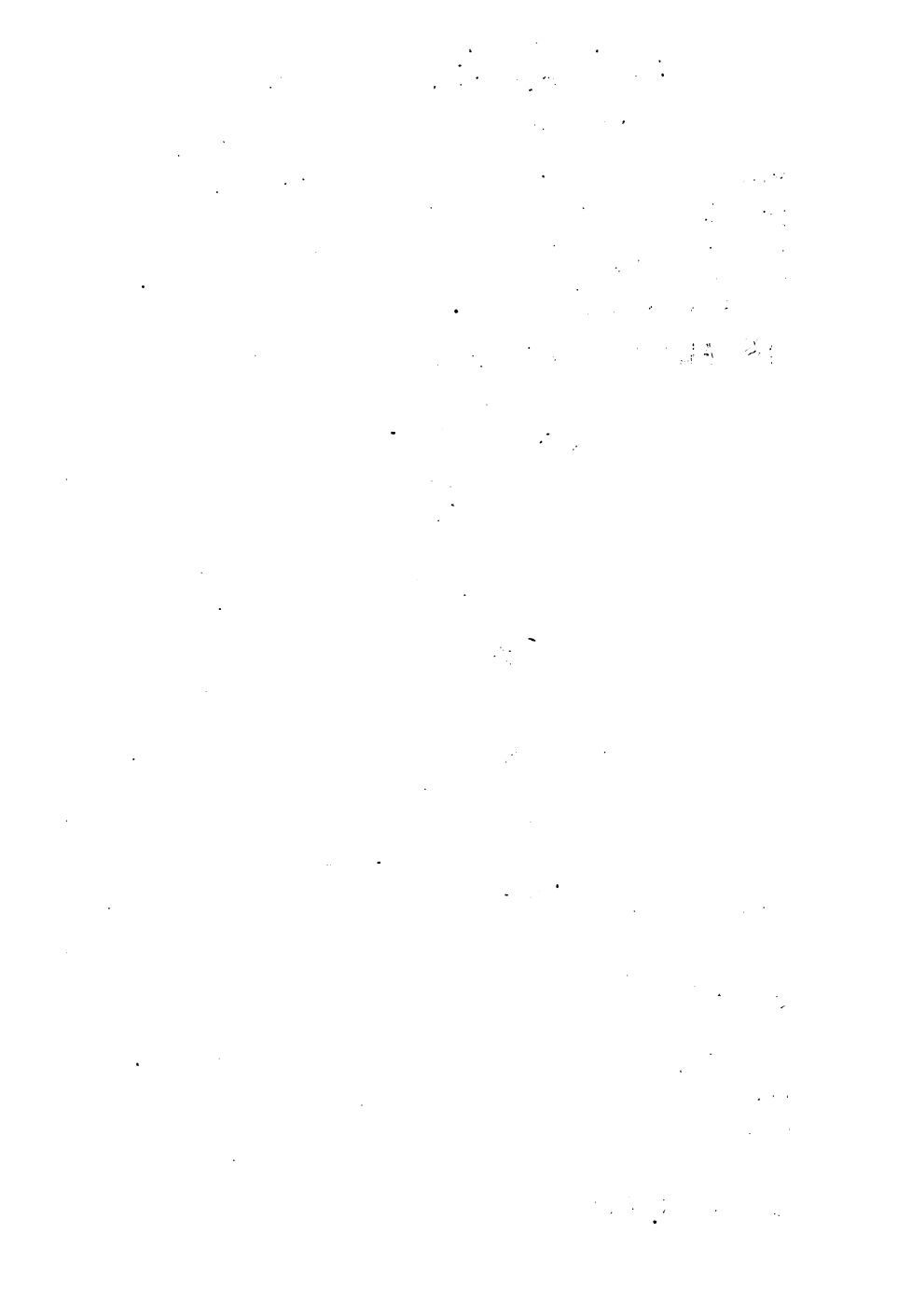
"I do understand," he said, quickly. "I shall never be jealous of your love for Robert; for even though it did darken my life, the shadow has long since fled."

"I know, I know," she interrupted, "but I wanted to tell you the difference. Then, if you are satisfied—perhaps my feelings are stronger than I think."

For answer, he rose abruptly to his feet, and as she, too, left her chair, she suddenly found herself folded in his arms. The light shone softly on her upturned face. It was paler than usual, but in her eyes was the reflected light of his own great happiness, and behind such happiness the truest Love must live.

THE END.

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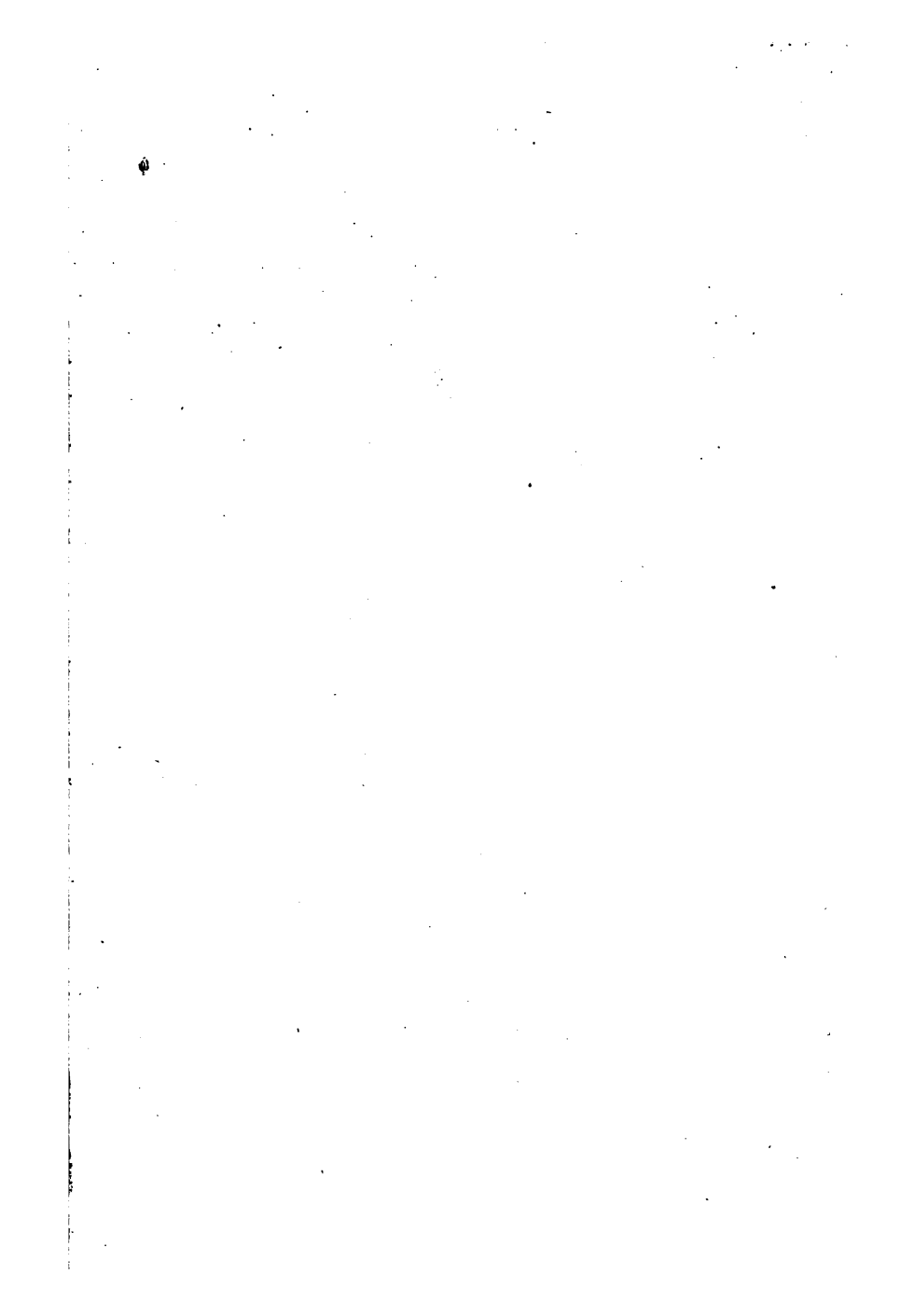
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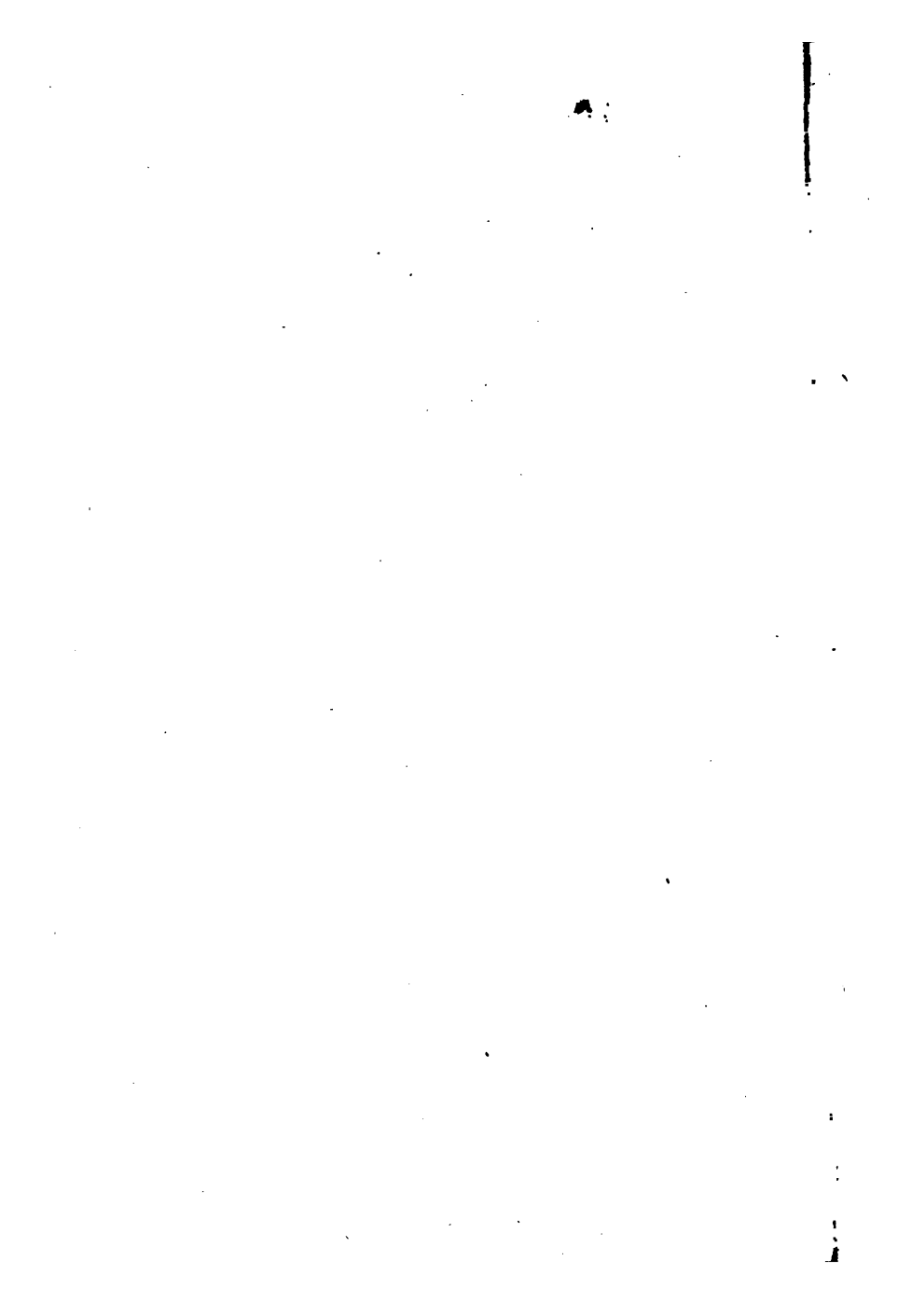
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